

# THE Highbrows

C. E. M. JOAD



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## The Highbrows

# *Novels of To-day*

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# The Highbrows

A Modern Novel *by* C. E. M. Joad



Jonathan Cape

Eleven Gower Street, London

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## Foreword

THIS book is dedicated to all those who will think it immature, which of course it is, and will deny that it is a novel, which equally of course it isn't. At the same time, it is a sufficiently near approximation to a *modern* novel to be pardonably mistaken for one.

It makes no pretence at plot ; the incidents are few and sketchy ; the characters are mere puppets for the writer to hang his polemical hat on ; while the conversation is perhaps hardly so brilliant as frequent.

There is no continuity, and no sequence of incident. Instead, we have moralizing essays, rhetorical exercises, and didactic discussions—sufficient to justify the suggestion that the author regards his novel as a sort of dust-bin into which to shoot his refuse ideas—and the cinematographic impressions of a young man who looks at the world, and relies upon the stores of reminiscence instead of upon the play of imagination when he comes to write his novel.

The young man is as modern as the novel : just too clever to qualify for the ecclesiastical or educational professions, he is not clever enough to make a novelist ; too artistic in temperament to be a successful man of the world, he lacks the creative faculty of the artist. He is an artist nevertheless in everything except output, which means that he is versatile, restless and

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ineffective, and, following the habit of his kind, seeks in tendencies and views of life the satisfaction he fails to find in life itself.

It may well be asked whether such a bundle of impressions were worth recording; it may also be asked why it should be assumed that, when recorded, they are worth reading?

The form of the modern novel has been the subject of much controversy: it has been vigorously assailed and as vigorously defended; but no critic, so far as I am aware, has thought to develop the form to its logical conclusion by writing a novel which is far more like a modern novel than any novel ought to be, and in so doing, to pass a commentary upon it more significant than the most searching of reviews.

It is not suggested that this course has necessarily been adopted in the pages which follow; but it is hoped that a presentation in a salient form of the more eccentric characteristics of the novel as it is to-day, will enable critics to estimate with more certainty than they appear to do at present, the significance of those developments in literary form which we are accustomed to regard as peculiarly modern.

C. E. M. J.



## Chapter I : *Dabbling in the Slums*

### § I

ON the fifth evening of his first term, Pramp was sitting in his rooms wondering if it were possible to work in Oxford. Enter with enthusiasm and a rush a tall, fair-headed man, clean-limbed and pink-faced.

"You'll come to our Lads' Club, won't you?" he said.

"What's that?"

"Oh, a club the College runs for errand boys down in St. Clement's. That's a poor part of Oxford, you know. You'll get some literature about it in a day or two, and the annual meeting comes off next Sunday in the College Hall."

"But what do you do there?"

"Oh, just go down and talk to the boys and rag about with them. You needn't be any special good at entertaining or anything, you know; but it's quite easy, though you feel a bit awkward at first. If you are any good at boxing or gym or fretsaw it would be awfully useful, and we're hoping to do a play this term."

"I should like to help in that. I did a little acting at school." This was modest for Pramp, who had really created something of a furore in school plays, had always taken the leading parts and been offered a job by an Old Boy, who was present, in a third-rate

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provincial company, which had since gone bankrupt.

“ Well, come down next Thursday night. We’ll get some of the boys together who are likely to take part, and you can see what you can do with them. Some other freshers will be coming too. Be in the porch at 8 o’clock.”

“ All right,” said Pramp, who had no intention of fulfilling his promise.

Before Thursday evening came, however, there was the annual meeting on Sunday. Oxford was just then convulsed in the throes of a great spasm of Social Reform. Reaction from the Newman spirit, plus a dash of the prevalent socialism, had moulded and directed it along the lines of heartiness and social intercourse with the masses. All the phenomena of Revivalism, except religion, which formed a sort of background to the whole, never obtruded but always vaguely immanent, might be observed. One must go down and live among the workers, study their lives at close quarters, and patronize no longer from a social pedestal. Social distinctions were to vanish for the slummer. He might tyrannize over his scout and enjoy the unearned income of the parasite, but during the actual period of slumming all classes were to be regarded alike as children of the God of good-fellowship. As a concrete expression of this spirit, great tentacles stretched out from the Alma Mater in the shape of Settlements which were to embrace the slums of London and imbue them with Christianity, lounge coats and the Oxford manner. Orgiastic orators came each term to Oxford pleading for men and money in the great task of renovating the poor. The earnest went slumming for at least a week in every vac., cultivated with conscious assiduity the friendship of

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butchers' assistants and bus conductors, and bedecked their mantelpieces with photographs of their humble friends and cards showing their football fixtures.

Religion was not to be forced down the throat of the working lad. The quiet example of the upright, helpful life was held more potent than the conscious reference to the obvious God. It was sufficient to seduce the boys from the cinema and the pub, it being assumed that the Deity would follow somewhere in the rear. Thenceforward He always lurked in ambuscade, ready to snatch the ripe fruit of young souls when a course of heartiness and clean living had brought them to maturity.

The movement had its psychological as well as its religious side. For the future rulers of the country it was necessary to study at close quarters the future ruled. Stress was laid on the importance of "getting to know" the boys. The slumming undergraduate was animated by something of the collector's interest. The unsuspecting poor were examined, dissected, indexed, catalogued under distinctive types, and lodged for future reference in the young statesman's mind to point a moral or to illustrate a speech. Thus the prevalent catchword was, "We get just as much, if not more, good from them than they do from us." This may well have been possible, for though no marked difference was observable in the boys under the treatment of the University visitation, the Lads' Club set in the College came early to be distinguished by certain unmistakable characteristics.

Strong, the president of the club, and the first speaker at the meeting which was duly attended by Pramp, served as an embodiment of the ideals to which the supporters of the club endeavoured to aspire. A

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large, red-haired man with striking features, his aggressive dogmatism on any subject with which he was acquainted, and his pretentious diffidence with regard to the few with which he was not, were only prevented from being offensive by the unfailing sense of humour and geniality which bubbled out of him like a perennial spring. He was so entirely a "muscular Christian," with a permanent mission to make the world every day so much the better from the fact of his being in it, that had he been a smaller man he would have had no time to be anything else.

In point of fact, however, so far was Strong the Christian from swamping Strong the man, that his missionizing in the slums was much more the expression of an unbounded energy and egoism than of any fundamentally Christian impulse. The Lads' Club provided him with a safety valve for his superfluous ego. He craved the limelight at all costs, even if the limelight was only a gas flare, and the impressionable material of massed errand boys provided him at once with an audience and a stage from which to pose to the world. At the club he divided his time between reading evangelical lectures to erring adolescence and capering in the limelight for the amusement of his favourites. He never failed to gather round him a collection of small boys, at whose heads he delivered in impartial chunks a peculiar kind of elephantine humour, reverting in its primitive and personal characteristics to the wit of the preparatory school. He was invincible at cheap repartee, and had a feminine capacity for terminating every conversation to his own advantage.

Next to the Lads' Club, the semi-philosophical discussions so common at Oxford gave the best scope

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for his dialectical skill. He was ambitious to fill the rôle of the scholarly and pre-eminently up-to-date Christian, who has his fingers on the ropes of all the latest scientific and philosophical doctrines, and has successfully bridled and harnessed them to his religious cart.

It was in the same vein that in politics he figured as an enlightened Tory, cognisant but contemptuous of all branches of so-called advanced political thought. He deprecated the present half-digested education of the masses as more harmful than their previous ignorance, carefully acquainted himself with Socialist doctrines, sifted them and rejected them as tending to create a purely destructive discontent.

He was an eloquent speaker, and magnetized all but the most cynical freshers.

"When you first go down to the club," he said, "you'll feel like a helpless ass who doesn't know what to do with his hands, and hasn't a word to say for himself. I simply hated it at first. But if you stick it out you'll soon find your feet. Talk to the boys about whatever they are interested in, the club football and cricket teams, or the books they've read, and make a point of getting to know one or two boys intimately. Above all, don't be superior. You will find them surprisingly quick at sizing you up, and if they see any evidence of standoffishness or superiority, they'll dismiss you once and for all with 'He's a bally gent,' and you will never get any further with them. To be a 'bally gent' is the most severe and contemptuous criticism they can pass on you.

"You see, the sinister reputation of the ordinary undergraduate in the town saddles us with a great responsibility. You must remember that these boys only



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see undergraduates in the streets, that is, when they are at their worst. Their conception of the typical undergraduate is of some knut in evening dress, always rowdy and often drunk, strolling along arm in arm with three or four others, swearing at anyone who gets in his way, and accosting loose women. The undergraduate is thus condemned by the better boys as a low snob, the enemy of the townsman, and worshipped by the rotters as the ideal model of what a really swagger young man should be. The greatest difficulty you have to fight against is the kind of answer you are continually getting from boys whom you try to dissuade from betting or swearing or talking immorally : ‘ Get along with you. Why, that’s what I heard that young gentleman from — College say the other night. What’s good enough for him is good enough for us. What’s the harm in it if he says it ? ’

“ That’s the picture of the undergraduate we’ve got to wipe away, and that’s why we want you all to come to the club. Will you come and help us ? ”

During the next few days, Strong contrived to have a word with almost every fresher individually on the subject of the club, with the result that many young men less impressionable than Pramp found that they had come to Oxford to get an interest in the poor.

On Thursday, at 8 o’clock, Pramp duly went down to the club ; Crosby, who had originally called on him, conducted him, in company with four other sheep-like freshers, through some slums of incredible dinginess to a tall tumble-down building, with every pane in every window shattered, whence issued pandemonium indescribable. Inside were dust, bare rooms with paper peeling from the walls, a staircase with broken stairs and no banisters, and innumerable boys, dirty and

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raucous, laughing and yelling, wrestling and smelling, who took not the slightest notice of the entry of the freshers. A few embarrassed undergraduates were vainly trying to enforce a little order.

There was a football room lit by two flaring jets in which the dust made it quite impossible to see the ball, a billiard room with the cloth cut in five places, cues without tips, and pockets without bottoms, and a gym with horizontal and parallel bars upon which a few boys in their coat sleeves were indulging in some desultory exercises.

The floor of the gym was littered with a collection of tattered boxing gloves which were being used as missiles by a small band of young ruffians who hurled them with unerring aim at the more salient features of the anatomies of the earnest who were pursuing physical culture on the horizontal bars. A nicely timed shot caught Pramp full in the mouth with a particularly old and evil-smelling glove, just as the flock of freshers entered. Pramp giggled as heartily as he could.

At the end of the gym stood a piano with its yellow keys scarred and cracked, cacophonously strident in tone, upon which a small boy was picking out "Rule Britannia" with two fingers.

Nowhere was there any attempt at order or organization.

Pramp, left to himself, felt entirely superfluous. He tried to get up a conversation with a quiet-looking boy about the club football teams. It failed dismally as the boy's ignorance on the subject was as great as his own, and he was about to leave the place in disgust when a boy came up to him, pulled at his sleeve and shouted in his ear :

"Was you the gen'leman as was going to start the

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play ? ” Pramp admitted that he had said something about it, whereupon he was immediately conducted by the boy up some more steps to the third storey. They entered an upper room, lit by a single candle (the gas burner had been broken off the night before and was quite useless), inhabited by six turbulent-looking boys and Crosby, who was vainly beseeching them to keep quiet.

“ Oh, here you are, Pramp,” said the latter. “ This is the play that we’ve decided on, and these boys are going to take part. See what you can do with them, will you ? ” Whereat he held out a tattered playbook entitled “ Jemmy and the Copper,” nodded to Pramp and left the room.

Thus Pramp took over the dramatic management of the club.

It did not take long to become acquainted with the members of the cast and the acquaintance, aided by a gradual elimination of the unruly ones, grew into liking. Pramp visited the club at least once a week, and, by dint of threats, bribing and cajolery, gradually got about three-quarters of the play rehearsed. The last scene never was rehearsed, mainly owing to the continued failure of the actors to turn up in time. Consequently on the night the actors, who had forgotten or had never learnt their parts, extemporized through the gaps in the prompting by throwing chairs and tables about the stage and by indiscriminate scuffling. This part of the performance was greatly appreciated by the audience, and when owing to the unparalleled energy of the actors, the floor of the jerry-built stage, which had only been put up that afternoon, gave way, and the hero disappeared through a hole between two boards, taking the carpet with him, the curtain came



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down amid shouts of enthusiasm from the massed boys and parents who took this unrehearsed effect as the climax of a very spirited performance.

I suppose it is given to every member of the middle-class at sometime or other to make observations on the various phenomena exhibited by the working-classes. One is almost tempted to think that the main function of the working-classes is to supply material for middle-class reflection, and every student is struck by a different feature. To Pramp the lower classes, as personified by the members of the Lads' Club, appeared to be most pre-eminent for their complete lack both of unhappiness and concentration. They were indecently happy, and incredibly changeable. The essence of public school and University tradition lies in the assumption of the principle that when one has once "taken up" something one doesn't abandon it till one has either mastered it or proved oneself incapable of mastering it.

These are the qualities which are alleged to have made England what it is. Pramp was pained to find that the club boys lacked them. Any attempt at organized games or instruction at the club, anything demanding concentration, mastery of difficulties or continued effort was doomed to failure from the first.

For instance, a fretwork class would flash as a heaven-sent inspiration into the mind of one of the committee. Generosity, duly acknowledged, provided the tools, and the president imparted the necessary information to a half-amused, half-eager assemblage of boys after prayers. Names were given in for a class, and the time for the first session was fixed. The first evening all the selected would appear, and half the rest of the club besides. Most of the evening would be devoted to excluding the

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undesirables, and enlightenment into the mysteries of fretwork from a nervously sweating undergraduate would follow during the remainder. A few saws would be broken and the session would close. At the next meeting half the class only would turn up, at the next one or two. By this time all the tools would be in various stages of dissipation, the wood stolen, and the enthusiasm evaporated. The fretwork class would die, to be renewed again with equal faith a year afterwards.

Similar attempts were continually being made to provide some kind of light instruction. Stories would be read, discussions initiated, or essays set, the boys being induced to send in contributions by the hope of a prize. A couple of essays of a shameless crudity, which should have disqualified their authors for any reward, had it not been decided to give a prize in any case, would be sent in. The prizes would be duly given in the presence of the assembled club, and a further essay competition would be announced. There would be no competitors.

A debating society arose from time to time Phoenix-like from its oft repeated ashes with eternally the same result. The boys were incapable of making set speeches; humour from the corner of a personal and abusive kind was rampant, and the debate usually subsided into an acrimonious conversation between two or three members on entirely irrelevant subjects.

Pramp experienced the same difficulty with his rehearsals. The company would promise faithfully to appear at a given hour on a given night. Twenty minutes after the time, about half of the cast would foregather with discouraging news of the other half. Bert would bring news that Buckham could not come,

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and that he himself would have to leave early as he was taking his girl to the cinema.

"Where's Scragg?" Pramp would say.

"Oh! Scragg ain't a'coming."

"Why not? He said he would. What's the old blighter doing?"

"E's meeting his girl."

"Where's George?"

"He's gone over to Oseney."

"Well, he might have let me know. What about Frank?"

"I don't believe Frank never meant to come. He goes to his ambulance class now."

Occasionally they would avow frankly that they were fed up with the whole concern. It was a rotten play. They weren't any good at acting. They didn't come there to be sworn at, or to be laughed at by College gentlemen. Mr. Pramp had better get some gentleman from College to do the part. But as surely as Mr. Pramp gave a recalcitrant up in disgust, he would appear at the next rehearsal, and finding his own part filled, would embellish the proceedings with extemporaneous interpolations necessitating his reintroduction as a legitimate member of the cast if only to stop his mouth.

The main characteristic of the whole club was precisely this spasmodic kind of activity, a desultoriness that precluded any sustained interest in anything, but not altogether surprising perhaps when it be remembered that the boys came to the club for relaxation after ten or eleven hours' running errands, full of a superfluous physical energy which demanded an outlet in boxing, or football, or indiscriminate ragging, not in concentration or sustained mental effort. But these

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considerations were beyond the reach of the committee, again not surprising when a horrified amazement is seen to pervade the whole of the middle-class at the preference shown by working boys for spending their evenings in pubs or cinemas instead of at evening classes provided by a conscientious education authority, thus light-heartedly abandoning with the wanton irresponsibility of the lower classes, the chances of self-improvement gratuitously offered by a benevolent legislature at middle-class expense.

Thus, though the club aimed always at instructing, it succeeded only in amusing. But even this limited achievement was a source of gratification.

In various ways the committee managed to persuade themselves that the work they were doing at the club mattered enormously, and the influence of a personality such as Strong's was potent to infect the College with the same persuasion.

Sunday came to stand out as the crowning day of the club week. Punctually at three in the afternoon, Strong and one or two others would open the club for the purpose of holding service. Half a dozen boys expelled by the bulging stuffiness of their fat-pervaded dining-rooms, or impelled by the desire to win favour as godly youths, straggled into the gymnasium, which acted as an extemporary chapel, murdered two or three hymns, gaped through a slab of the Bible administered by way of lesson, and submitted passively to a "talk."

The latter was a monologue, which carefully shunned the appellation "Sermon." The fiction that the boys bestowed as much as they received, a fiction maintained even when they sat silent under the words of the admonisher, was carefully maintained in the use of the word "talk." Strong talked mainly of unselfishness



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and manliness, of abstention from dealings with young women, except in the way of chivalry, of forbearance and the rendering of small services to other members of the club. They were to go to bed nightly feeling that they had illuminated each day by at least one good deed. They were to console themselves in the midst of disappointments by the reflection that the world was at least one jot and tittle the happier and the better each day from the fact that they had lived in it. Loyalty to the club was apparently a way to salvation, and the club came to be endowed with a corporate personality like the Hegelian State.

Pramp, who once ventured to discuss the basis of Christian belief, deprecating crude conceptions of marble halls—harp re-echoing on the one hand, and babies frying in their own blood on the other—was advised that such rationalistic speculations were well enough for intellects strengthened by Philosophy, but taken undigested by those unversed in controversy were apt to unsettle and impair the unquestioning obedience to Christian precepts so beneficial for the boys. Simple doctrine was required for working lads : the literal word was their proper food.

Service over, attempts were made to read to the boys from the work of some manly author ; *Treasure Island* or *Sherlock Holmes* were the most favourite compromises between the desire to elevate the taste to good literature, and the necessity of pleasing the taste in bad. Pramp tried recitals of ghost stories, but these were disapproved of as being over-sensational.

After tea, taken on return to College, the club committee would meet in one of the dons' rooms. Mr. Rowlands, the don in question, took a paternal though somewhat Olympian interest in the club, because he

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regarded it as a means of introducing the future rulers of the country to the practical problems of social reform, and the future ruled to God and the cheerful altruism appropriate to their station, as a set-off to beer and women, which otherwise might have won their hearts. It also afforded a good theme for elaboration before disappointed parents, showing that their sons had at least not "wasted their time at the University." Activity in the club could be represented as bringing their sons a knowledge of the real problems of the world, a splendid substitute for success in schools, providing insight into life instead of into books. His connexion with the club also won him a reputation in the College for being up to date and in touch with modern affairs, not confined in the more generous reaches of his mind to the narrow sphere to which his professorship confined him. (He knew about Greek inscriptions.)

He was chiefly witty at committees, and was the master of an esoteric phraseology and an elephantine childlikeness that endeared him to the hearts of the hearty. At times he was even brilliant with quotation and metaphor, but his brilliance was the brilliance of a well-soaped bald head, glistening not naturally but as the varnish of erudition laid upon a primitive mildness. He would profess, for instance, a childlike delight in the annual visitation to Oxford of a circus, and was to be seen nightly admiring the antics of cockney cowboys in the centre of a crowd of applauding "club men." He was particularly useful in keeping the rambling discussions of the committee to the point, except when the digressions were the outcome of his own wit.

Bowels, the secretary, was officious and elegant. He

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did no work for the club, but looked beautiful, came from Eton and served the double purpose of a figure-head and a scapegoat. He had no enemies and no acquaintances. Every one he knew was one of his closest friends. He never said anything at all at committees. Pramp was admitted as a neophyte to membership of the committee after two terms, and was duly impressed into silence by Strong's palpable sense of the honour that membership bestowed.

The reading of the minutes imparted an air of formality to the proceedings, which Strong, as president, tried desperately hard to maintain. Efficient transaction of business was, however, continually punctuated and delayed by discursive passages of recriminatory heartiness between the members.

"There's been another case of stealing this week," Strong would say. "Somebody got into the office in the daytime and broke open the cash-box. There's no evidence, but we half-suspect Rousy Price."

"How do you propose to bring it home to him?" says Rowlands.

"Well, the first thing to find out is if it really is done in the daytime as we suspect, or during club hours at night; we don't know which yet."

"Couldn't we tie some cotton across the doorway in the daytime, shut the door, and see if it's broken at night?" Crosby proposed.

"I didn't know you were a Sherlock Holmes, Billy. Been reading his Memoirs?"

"No, Billy works too hard to have time for Sherlock Holmes, doesn't he?"

Rowlands looks round for confirmation of his estimate of the amount of work done by Billy. Everybody bears testimony, some for, some against, the extent

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and duration of Billy's academic labours. Controversy rages ; some even asserting that the cotton proposal was an original inspiration from the fertile well of Billy's mind, and the question of whether this was or was not so now displaces the intensity of Billy's work as the main theme.

Eventually Strong, in desperation, would say : " Well, what about Rousy Price ? "

" Couldn't some one stop in the office all day, have his meals there and watch ? Bowels hasn't much work to do." Bowels protested that he had.

" It's jolly risky trusting Bowels alone in the same room with the cash-box."

" And there's Mrs. Clark, the charwoman, downstairs. She wouldn't be safe alone in the house with a man of Bowels' charm."

" I thought Rousy Price was rather a pet of Strong's," remarked Crosby. " I don't see why Strong should go out of his way to suspect him particularly."

" Yes ! He's a sort of valet of mine," said Strong. " He comes up to the College and brushes my clothes, takes my boots to be mended and generally makes himself useful."

" Well, you oughtn't to be so jolly well down on him if you employ him."

" Ah, well. Every man's a Nero to his valet," remarked Rowlands.

This sally produced protests and merriment from the committee which impeded the transaction of business for another five minutes.

So the committee rambled on. Drink and women, staple themes for male humour, being tacitly taboo among moral elevators, a certain sameness characterized much of the humour which centred largely round



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the physical and facial peculiarities of the various persons discussed. The abnormality of their appetites would also furnish food for mutual jest. It is a trait observable in the religious of Low Church sympathies that they are unduly given to eating, just as vestments and incense at the other pole of righteousness tend to be associated with a mellow discrimination in matters of wine. The pillars of the Lads' Club were no exception to the stomachic idiosyncrasies of their kind, even though the organ in question was not as yet distinguished by encasement in the cloth.

The proclivities of Strong for beef and Yorkshire pudding were notorious, and as surely as his exploits at the dinner-table duly refreshed the memory of his friends on the point, so surely would they be recounted for the enlivenment of the committee.

With so many extraneous themes for conversation, and with Rowlands being witty in the background, it was small wonder that questions of high policy, such as the provision of a cricket field for the boys, the arrangements for parents' night, the whipping up of slack freshers, or the moral backslidings of Rousy Price were squeezed out or but cursorily treated. Later they would be settled expeditiously by the officer on the spot, as the need arose.

Sunday committee meetings were ended by the chapel bell. They were prolonged to the last minute, ostensibly by pressure of business, more probably to permit of the elect striding *en masse* into chapel in the lull before service began.

The College, ranged on either side, could not fail to be impressed with the phenomenon of righteous solidarity thus presented to it. The committee, tall, upstanding, vigorous and well washed, strode radi-

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antly up the aisle in their surplices, marching to thank God for the privilege of being his chosen vessels for the spreading of the light in the slums of Oxford. Dons smiled benignantly and undergraduates tried not to look uncomfortable. Pramp, duly impressed, henceforth embraced Christianity and the Great Poor.

### § 2

Pramp plunged so enthusiastically into the glories of an Oxford summer term that the peculiar attractions of the Lads' Club underwent a temporary eclipse. The heated, rackety club, presenting to his nostrils the acrid smell of poverty's clothes intensified by the hot weather, the cheap gas flares, the stifling dust and threadbare jokes, revolted what must be described in Pramp as the awakening of an æsthetic sense.

Fortunately the club was permitted to slacken its activities somewhat in the summer term. There was a difficulty in inducing the boys to come in on fine, light evenings. The energies of the committee were, moreover, now becoming increasingly subordinated to preparations for camp.

The camp was the crown and consummation of the club year. For a whole week forty of the club lads were transported to some secluded spot on the sea coast, under the charge of eight or nine undergraduates. They were housed in tents which they pitched themselves, and were divided into squads to forage, cook and wash up in relays. Bathing, sports, long walks and an open-air life, combined with a whole week's unrestricted intercourse with the public school spirit, were to put the finishing stroke to the year's work in moulding and developing the boys.

All the influences for good which had been at work

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upon them for the past year in the club, all the ideals of loyalty, unselfishness and uprightness with which they had formed acquaintance, but to which they had given as yet but a fitful allegiance, were now to be concentrated on the boys gathered together in a community of their own, divorced from the baneful influence of home and workshop, and were to send them back to Oxford changed characters, self-reliant, capable citizens of the great Empire which was their heritage.

Such was the ideal of the camp week as conceived by Strong, as fostered by the committee under his influence, and as passively acquiesced in by Pramp.

Pramp arranged early to go to the camp, which was to be established on the shores of the Solent, with the New Forest in the background. The place had been chosen principally because its remoteness from villages and inns made it peculiarly difficult for the boys to fall under the two temptations from which it was the particular function of the club to protect them : girls and drink. Pramp had urged that, as they lived in the midst of both these dangers, with every opportunity to succumb to either should they wish to do so during fifty-one weeks of the year, it was hardly very important to adopt these elaborate precautions during the fifty-second.

He had been overruled, however, on the ground that the spirit of the club, and the ideals with which it was associated in the minds of the boys, rendered it imperative that no breath either of women or alcohol should dim the brightness of the club's shield of purity.

Pramp bicycled over from Southampton, where he had been staying, on a fine June morning—the first day of a week of gloriously hot weather. The camp had

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been pitched in a field of stubble about two hundred yards from the sea, and the tents, six in number, were already up. The boys and most of the members of the committee, Strong, Crosby, Bowels, Mr. Rowlands and Hadley, the secretary, a High Churchman destined for Holy Orders, had already arrived.

Pramp's welcome from Strong did not seem to be as hearty as he had expected ; but this apparent lack of cordiality might easily have been due to the president's extreme preoccupation, as he was sitting among a throng of about twenty boys, vainly endeavouring to sort them into their various tents, a proceeding rendered doubly difficult by the fact that each boy wanted to be in a tent with five or six chosen companions, most of whom wanted to be in a tent with somebody else.

"Huilo Pramp!" said Strong. "Just arrived? Good! Have you got a mattress yet? Bowels has just taken half a dozen boys up to the farm to get straw for the mattresses. You'd better go along too if you want one."

Pramp found a scene of great uproariousness in the straw-yard of a little farm where Bowels was trying without success to instil a little order into the six boys, who were much too busy smothering one another in straw to pay any attention to the filling of mattresses.

Pramp was hailed with acclamation and was soon rioting and scuffling with the rest, thus encouraging the boys to disregard Bowels by lending them the countenance of his official position.

It was dark before the mattresses were filled and Pramp and the boys returned to the camp with their arms round one another's necks, singing and shouting uproariously.

Pramp fancied a note of disapproval in Strong's look.



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Mr. Rowlands regarded him solemnly and inquired very coolly whether he was enjoying himself.

"Rather," said Pramp. "We're going to have a sing-song in my tent now. Who's in my tent? Come on!"

Everybody now wanted to be in Pramp's tent, scenting lax authority and easy discipline, and Strong's laborious apportionment was all undone. Pramp finally found that the six largest boys had managed to secure the desired places in his tent, by the simple method of shouting down or intimidating all the smaller claimants. They immediately retired in an ecstasy of mutual approbation to the tent which they insisted on regarding as a sort of castle, fiercely challenging any outsider to approach it, and singing music-hall songs at the top of their voices with Pramp (who only discovered later that singing in the tents was forbidden) to lead them.

Supper followed in a sort of marquee which had been erected for meals, prayers and other community functions. The boys sat at long deal tables, and clamoured for food like wild beasts. The University members waited on them, scurrying from the kitchen to the marquee with an enormous expenditure of effort and little system in their endeavours to keep all the boys supplied with food.

Pramp would appear burdened with plates of porridge at the opening of the marquee to be greeted with shouts, threats, cajolings and pleadings, according as the method of command or supplication which appeared to each boy as the most likely to bring him food.

"'Ere Pramp, old sport, bring it 'ere."

"You wouldn't forget old Mike, Mr. Pramp, not old Mike."

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“ No, don’t give it to ’im, Mr. Pramp. He never liked you, he didn’t. I was always yer friend, Mr. Pramp. I allus loved you, I did.”

“ Now then, Mr. Pramp, hurry up with the blessed dope.”

“ ’Ere let’s ’ave that porridge, or I’ll cop yer one afterwards.”

“ No, that ain’t fair, Mr. Pramp. Scragg allus gets ’is before me. There’s too much favouritism in this club. That’s what it is.”

Serving at meals was one of the most exhausting functions Pramp had ever performed ; in addition to the fatigue of the performance, he was usually lusting for food himself, but was not able to get any before all the boys had been served, contenting himself meanwhile with such surreptitious mouthfuls as he could manage to swallow *en route* from the kitchen to the marquee.

There was a good deal of discussion after supper as to which of the committee should go next morning, which was Sunday, to early Communion at Beaulieu Church, seven miles away ! A great display of self sacrifice and self denial was exhibited, each member of the committee insisting that he should be left behind to take charge of the boys and bring them to church later in the morning, and that the others should indulge in the comfort and privilege of partaking of Holy Communion. As this ceremony was to be followed by a substantial meal of kidneys and bacon, to which they had been invited at the Vicarage, it is possible that the self denial of those who pleaded to be left behind was only in part assumed. Strong, who had procured the invitation, must of course go. After an edifying display of reluctance to accompany him, and by so doing to desert the others, it was settled that Hadley, whose need for divine intimacy

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could be considered less immediately urgent than that of the others, as his intended profession ensured it for him for the remainder of his life, and Pramp, whose Christian enthusiasm being of a modified intensity was not thought to require sustenance, should be left behind.

Pramp was awakened very early next morning, it appeared afterwards that it was at 5.30 a.m., by the sound of some one playing "The Merryman and his Maid" from the "Yeomen of the Guard" on the cracked piano in the marquee. The player only knew the chorus, and very inadequately at that, and Pramp, who lay in bed, exasperated at the impossibility of again going to sleep, counted no less than twenty-five repetitions of the same chorus. The tune stuck in his mind ever afterwards, associating itself with the camp and all that happened there, after the well-known manner of tunes, a habit of theirs chiefly remarked, however, in the case of songs of sentiment.

Pramp was next called upon to resist an exhortation from Hadley to come and bathe before breakfast on the ground that it would set such a good example to the boys. Pramp hated before-breakfast bathing. The process was unpleasant enough in itself, and ill-compensated for the subsequent return to one's bedroom in pyjamas and a blue and shivering condition misnamed glow of health and exhilaration. But this was nothing to the hot-eyed prickly feeling that supervened about eleven o'clock in the morning, and the interminable length of the day consequent upon the extravagant expenditure of energy and effort upon the beginning of it. There is a curious belief in England in the existence of people who are early morning bathers, meaning all the people we do not know; Pramp had rarely met

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anyone who paid other than an overnight lip service to the habit of before-breakfast bathing.

Hadley was somewhat huffed at his refusal, and more so when after breakfast on the road to Beaulieu Church Pramp marched on ahead with about twenty of the largest boys, talking loudly and occasionally bursting into choruses of music-hall songs, with a perfect roar for "In the Shadows," just then at the zenith of its popularity.

As they approached Beaulieu, Hadley came up to Pramp and suggested that they should walk together in advance, in order that the procession might approach the church with some degree of seemliness.

Hadley was a fair-headed young man with that extraordinary power of not looking at you, found as a rule only in babies. He looked through Pramp and round him, and over him, and under him, while he made several trivial remarks about the scenery, their nearness to Beaulieu, the quality of the vicar's preaching, and the length of the service, and indulged in apprehensions as to whether the boys would behave themselves during the sermon.

"I hope you don't find my conversation boring," he said at last to Pramp. "I'm afraid it isn't up to the standard of you philosophy people."

Pramp was even more annoyed by this insincere apology than by the trivialities which had preceded it.

"You were wise enough to set the standard so low, that even you could not avoid talking up to it," he said, and the rest of the walk to the church passed in silence.

The church was hot and crowded, and several of the boys had to sit on the floor in the aisles, much to their own amusement which found audible expression in titterings. Pramp had a walking race home with two



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of the boys, but did not get a meal until nearly half-past two when the others arrived. It was not till after tea that Strong, who had avoided him all day, took him by the arm in his usual hearty way and asked whether he would care for a stroll.

Pramp, somewhat surprised at this attention, acquiesced, and they went through a few fields talking camp shop.

When they were some distance from the camp, Strong stopped short by a gate.

"I want to have a talk with you, Pramp, about several things," said he. "I know you'll think it awfully interfering of me and will want to tell me to mind my own business. My own view was in favour of not saying anything to you; but the committee thought that some one ought to speak to you, and I agreed to do it, as I suppose I know you better than any of the others."

"Yes!" said Pramp vaguely, wondering apprehensively what was coming.

"Well, it's about your behaviour with the boys. The committee think that you are altogether too familiar with them. Of course it is important not to be standoffish and snobbish and all that, but at the same time a certain amount of discipline has to be maintained, and the familiarity of your conduct weakens the respect of the boys for you personally, and through you for the College men generally. You rag about with them too much. They are always throwing their arms round your neck, or touching your hands, or wrestling with you. That sort of thing isn't exactly nice with anybody, and the boys are only too ready to jump at conclusions and put an indecent interpretation upon what is meant in pure good-natured friendliness, if you once let them take liberties of that kind."

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Pramp was appalled. The thing Strong was clearly trying to suggest seemed so repellent in connexion with the boys that he could have killed Strong for hinting it. Nothing had been farther from his thoughts in his intercourse with the boys, and he said as much.

"Oh, I am sure you are quite innocent of any intentions of that kind," said Strong, "but it's what the boys think, and what we, that is the committee, have heard. Some of the things the boys have said about you leave no doubt as to what they think. You see, the tone of your conversation with them isn't exactly likely to render suggestions of that kind impossible. For instance, you are always talking to them about their girls. Now it was decided when the club was started that the whole atmosphere and influence of the place should be of a kind to discourage talk of that sort in the club.

"The club was primarily intended to give the boys a place to go to, where they would be out of the influence of the Oxford street-girls. The boys have never been allowed to bring girls into the club, and no member of the committee has ever spoken to them except with disapproval on the subject, which has usually been ignored."

"In fact, you tried to get rid of an evil by shutting your eyes to it, and pretending it didn't exist," Pramp broke in.

"Not at all. It was simply understood that nobody mentioned women in the club. Talk about women among that class of boy only means obscenity, and the club has always set its face most strongly against anything likely to encourage lewd talk.

"Nobody would dare to speak to any other member of the committee about women, and yet they always seem to be whispering furtive love affairs to you.

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"But that isn't all, for while I am on the subject I might as well say everything that is in my mind. You've let us down badly over this, Pramp. Coming down in the train several of the boys told Crosby that they had seen you talking to street-girls at the fair on Port Meadow the last night of term. Crosby had just been warning them against talking to girls of this class, and they replied that they had seen you doing it, and that Mr. Pramp was a College gentleman, and that if Mr. Pramp did it it must be all right for them. Of course Billy was checkmated. His hands were tied because he couldn't let you down by saying one oughtn't to do it, and the boys scored off him badly.

"Now you know the reason for what you must have noticed, that we somehow haven't felt able to treat you in the same old free way this camp. It's like a stab in the back that sort of thing, and apart from your own good, you ought to consider that an example of this kind from you is most injurious to the boys."

Pramp felt utterly crushed. That a few flippant words with some factory girls on Port Meadow, and a rather vigorous use of the toy balloons, buzzers and paper mops, called "ladies' tormentors," could have assumed such momentous significance was to him an astonishing thing. He said of course that he was awfully sorry. He said that he had no idea that this thoughtless action on his part would make things so difficult for the committee; he said also that he would be more reserved in his manner to the boys in future, and in his heart he hated Strong for his priggishness, which Strong had all the time done his best to disclaim by continually interlarding his remarks with "I know you'll think me an awful prig for talking to you like this," and for the humiliation he put upon him.

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He hated the committee for discussing him behind his back, for branding him as a black sheep, and delegating to Strong, who obviously enjoyed the job as much as any parent who tells his child that he whips it for its own good, the duty of giving him a severe moral lecture. He knew with an unalterable conviction that Strong, despite his profession of distaste at the job he had just performed, had relished it with all the satisfaction of a confirmed moral meddler. Strong had excused himself by saying that he felt it his duty to speak to Pramp, but the word duty is a very convenient label when we want to do something which is in an equal degree unpleasant to somebody else, and pleasant to ourselves.

Pramp dreaded the five days of camp yet to run. He could hardly bear to meet the inquisitorial committee, who all professed in their manner so marked an ignorance of the moral spring cleaning which had just taken place, that it was evident at once that they had metaphorically been listening at the keyhole all the time. No body of men could have been so anxious to convey the impression that their manner really had not changed in the least, without being constrained by their anxiety to change it in every word they uttered. So eager were they to avoid noticing that something unusual had taken place, that they never seemed to be noticing anything else.

For the next day an expedition to the Isle of Wight had been planned, the expenses being met out of the generous pocket of Strong, or rather of Strong's father, a Liverpool shipowner. Anyway, Strong got the credit for it.

A seven-mile walk to Lymington and a sea passage to Alum Bay was followed by a walk over the cliffs to Tot-



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land Bay. Pramp, under the eagle eye of two committee men, had the greatest difficulty in repelling the embarrassing advances of the boys, who wrangled and fought for the seats nearest him in the boat.

They would take his arm when walking, or press him with fruit and sweets, till he hated the popularity which Strong had done his best to poison for him. Pramp could not help wondering whether Strong, eclipsed for once, had tasted sour grapes, but banished the thought as unworthy.

At Totland Bay the position became acute.

A crowd of boys with Pramp had stopped outside a small chemist's shop. The chemist, gifted with a peculiar sense of humour or a Napoleonic taste in advertising, had prefixed the most piquant labels to some aperient pills and medicines of which he made a prominent display.

Perhaps the air of Totland Bay tends to costiveness! Anyhow, the chemist, apparently a zealous alliterator, had dressed up homely Eno's Fruit Salts and Castor Oil Pills under such appetizing labels as "Lucy's Laxative," "Aunt's Aperient," and "Clysters for Clerics."

The boys roared with laughter and insisted on a detailed explanation from Pramp of what the labels meant. Pramp had the greatest difficulty in putting them off, his tongue being tied by the presence of Crosby a few yards off.

Separate explanations of the words laxative, aperient and clysters were demanded, and upon Pramp insisting that they all meant practically the same thing, the boys with a fine show of logic put the question why different words were used. Here Pramp was able to diverge from a discussion of the workings of the less reputable portions of our anatomy to the allurements of allitera-

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tion for certain types of mind, especially chemists, and found himself upon safer ground.

Going home, Strong spoke to him again and asked him if he was doing all he could to keep the boys from undue familiarity. "They seem to me," said Strong, "to treat you as if you were one of themselves."

"But surely that's the ideal of the club, to get rid of all class barriers between ourselves and the boys, at any rate while we are with them."

"Yes, within certain limits. But you let them go too far, and they take advantage of it by always trying to get you to talk about embarrassing things."

"Well, I've done whatever I could to-day to be reserved with them, but they don't seem to have any constraint with me as they do with you."

"That's just the difficulty," said Strong, and now Pramp had not the slightest doubt that he spoke partly in envy, and reproved in others what he was unable to achieve for himself.

As the week proceeded and the time approached for the boys to return to Oxford they grew more unruly and impatient of restraint.

Several had been discovered drinking in a neighbouring pub. They were confined to the camp for two days, but as they were big fellows, double their number were required to act as guards and unceasing surveillance became necessary on the part of the committee to keep them there. One boy was convicted of stealing and packed off to Oxford on the spot. The same fate happened to another who was seen kissing a village girl, and, what was worse, boasted of it.

On the last day sports were held, followed by a walk to Beaulieu and high tea there. When they returned, it was discovered that six of the boys, including three of



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those who had previously been confined to the camp, were missing.

It was already fairly dark, but search parties were sent out. About a mile from the camp, Pramp, Strong and two or three others who were searching together, came upon the defaulters sitting under a bank drinking beer, which they had bought in Beaulieu, and munching chocolates. They did not seem in the least abashed at being discovered.

"Why, blowed if it ain't Mr. Strong," said one.

"And good old Pramp with him!"

"Come and have a drop, Mr. Pramp. It's fine beer, this is."

"What be you a-doing of out here, Mr. Strong, breaking rules by being out at this time of night? I am surprised at Mr. Strong, aren't you, Bert?"

Strong mounted the high horse instantly.

"I suppose you think you are a very fine fellow, Thomas, sitting here drinking beer and breaking rules. I suppose you think this is a good return to make the club for all the club has done for you.

"How many times do you think you have been turned out of the club for good and all, and in a day or so back you have come whining to me: 'I won't cause any trouble in future, I won't really.' And 'Oh, Mr. Strong, do let me come to camp. I'll keep the rules, and won't try to be a nuisance to the officers. I promise on my honour, Mr. Strong.'

"Do you think conduct like this is going to help me to trust your word of honour any more? Do you think this is loyalty to the club, to do all you can to make our job here more difficult? Is that all you care about it?

"You've always professed to care for the club, Thomas. If you did, I shouldn't expect you to show it

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by going out of your way to defy us like this, and encouraging others to do the same. You can't have much affection for the club if this is the way you make light of all it stands for."

"The club's all right," growled Thomas. "Nothing the matter with the club!"

"Well, if you like the club, why don't you stand by it like a man, instead of taking a silly pleasure in breaking rules like a schoolboy?"

"But putting aside what you think of the club—and I shan't believe you care much for it after this—you knew what the club rules were before you came. Nobody asked you to come. What on earth do you mean then by coming here if you don't intend to keep the rules?"

"There are plenty of places where you can drink as much as you like if you want to and make a hog of yourself all day, and I don't care if you do. I've lost interest in you. What you want to come here for, the only place where you're not allowed to drink, I don't know?" A pause during which the boys looked embarrassed! Then Strong took the bull by the horns.

"Come, Thomas, throw those bottles away, and come back with us."

But Strong's last thrust had been a mistake in tactics. By intimating that Thomas's welfare was no longer a matter of concern to him, he had touched Thomas on a sore spot, his pride. If Thomas was not worth a gentleman's troubling about, then Thomas was not going to trouble about the gentleman. Anyway, if Mr. Strong meant what he said, he, Thomas, had done it now and he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb.

"I bain't coming back, Mr. Strong, yet awhile. You

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can get the others if you can, but I'm staying out a bit longer yet."

At this Strong lost his dignity and his temper and stooped to argue.

For ten minutes the wrangle went on while the other defaulters chuckled apprehensively and backed up Thomas. Then Strong strode forward to lay hands on Thomas. Thomas rushed at him head down, butted him in the stomach, winding him, and bolted. The others followed.

All night they stayed out. The next morning they appeared on the platform in time for the train back to Oxford, but the outraged members of the committee were stiff-necked and held no converse with them.

Pramp, who had come to see them off, could not help thinking as they got into a carriage by themselves that the victory lay with them.

They could jeer and exult over the helpless committee and the orderly ones under their care, and they did with a vengeance. The others could not answer back; they were tongue-tied, the committee by dignity, the boys by fear.

It seemed rather as if the bottom had fallen out of things when it was shown that boys could look after themselves without disaster, and even spend a night out in the open without the shepderding care of the men from College. It was distinctly an unfortunate episode! Certainly the camp had ended in an atmosphere of gloom.

### § 3

Pramp's attitude to the club cooled after the unfortunate episode at camp. But he had not yet correctly interpreted the cooling process to himself as the distaste

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of a temperamental individualist for the collective meddling with other people, strictly in the interests of the meddled with, which was the doctrine of the committee.

Most social workers are prompted at bottom by a desire for self-assertion and self-importance. Lacking the distinction to achieve this in their own sphere, they are driven to transfer their activities to the sphere beneath them, where their superior manners and education, aided by the inherent snobbishness of the British race, procure for them an authority and respect from sycophants and toadies, which the mediocrity of their talents denies them from their social equals. The toady too is automatically generated in considerable numbers among the lower classes by the flattering attentions of the social workers, as a growth of rank fungus is nourished by the dew from heaven.

Pramp's dissatisfaction with the Lads' Club, however, took for the time an unexpected form. He believed not that all social work was futile, but that he was not doing enough of it. The Lads' Club was too narrow. He had intimate acquaintance with a few poor boys, whereas he wanted to get into touch with the Great Poor.

And where were the great poor to be found but in London? To London then he must go. As a social worker at Carfax Hostel, University Hall, or some other settlement in the East End, he would be able to hold aloft the torch of Oxford and all she stood for, in those gloomy caverns of the slums where the excluded intermingle.

The East End for the earnest undergraduate before the war was at once a challenge and a mystery. The Crusading spirit was abroad! Yet the myth of the

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East End was only part of the more general and more glorious myth of London.

For the normal undergraduate there was always something of a London legend. To go to London on Saturdays and return by the late train was one of the recognized items in the complete undergraduate life. A journey to London in those days was a romance. When one remembers the delicious *frisson* of excitement attendant on those day trips to 'Town from Oxford, the opulent morning lolling on cushions in one's first-class carriage, pipe in mouth, with vistas of droning don in lecture room, one's habitual *milieu* at this illegitimate hour, to point the contrast, the meeting (how often one was met !) at Paddington, the matinée (guaranteeing at least a week's career as theatrical expert on the staff of a University paper on return), the *intime* and highly confidential dinner, let us say at the "Petit Gourmand," the important fussing thence to catch the 9.50—naïvely entitled—the curiously inquisitive glances up and down the Paddington platform, curious to discern a possible fellow-traveller, inquisitive as to who was seeing him off, the furtive eyeing for possible dons, the eager garnering of tit-bits of information to spice Oxford small talk with extra University sauce, the dreary journey, the rush for taxis, the inadequate supply, the running for College on the stroke of midnight, the barred gate, the aftermath of dean and fine—when one remembers all these esoteric details that served to engild a commonplace day in Town with all the glamour of romance, it is amazing in after years to notice the change that life and not *days* in London reveals in these familiar haunts, the grim drabness of Paddington, the dusty tawdriness of the "Petit Gourmand."



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These places then served as intimate pegs to hang our romantic hats on. Now our romantic hats have shrunk into Governmental, or it may be commercial bowlers, while the pegs have dwindled respectively into a place whence a man may travel, and a place where a man may feed, and just nothing more. Life may be regarded as a gift of the gods to be enjoyed by the young. More often it appears as the cost of the Almighty's mistake defrayed by the middle-aged.

At Oxford, on the whole, one tended to take the former view; but London is the most ingenious machine yet invented for turning youth into middle-age, for London changes life from a joke into a responsibility.

At Oxford one welcomed, nay quested, adventures romantic. In London one becomes painfully aware that if one has a propensity for falling into the fire it is as well to avoid lying on the hearth-rug.

From Oxford, Paddington is the portal that opens upon the glamour of cosmopolitanism; from London it is the doorway to the villas of suburbia.

This difference of attitude is especially to be remarked when it comes to dealing with the East End.

At Oxford, the East End is the happy hunting ground of the collector for the Museum of Humanity. Figuratively we bottle the poor as specimens. We scrutinize pauperdom through the scientist's spectacles.

We are didactic, too, and reformatory. We know things, and we tell the poor that we know them. We go down from Oxford as embryo doctors and tell them what to do with their bodies, or as embryo parsons and tell them what to do with their souls. We observe the East End as some modern fairyland, our object being to



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reform it until it ceases to be any longer worthy of our observation.

But once we are anchored in London, the East End ceases to be a kind of resuscitated Holy Land to which we lead bizarre Crusades and plant our flags in settlements. It becomes an unpleasant and very real agglomeration of slums somewhere out beyond Aldgate Pump. We go there no longer as Crusaders with a mission, but as officials with a black bag, and we get out of it as soon as we can.

Pramp went there definitely with the Oxford attitude. He wanted to do social research, and he planted his flag in that forcing house for embryo parsons, University Hall.

### § 4

Pramp arrived at University Hall in the Christmas Vacation, and was shown into a large comfortable upholstered room, which, he was informed, was the Common Room.

It was empty when he entered it, and he had to fill in half an hour with the copies of *Punch*, *The Sketch*, *The Tatler*, *The Observer*, and other high-class periodicals that lay scattered about the tables.

Presently a gong rang for tea and the inhabitants of the Hall came trooping in, talking vigorously, and made an impenetrable ring round the tea-table, where they omitted to hand one another tea and cake. Pramp was introduced by the urbanely smiling Chief to a short eager-faced little man, with an energetic, important manner and an abrupt voice, named Clandon, whose bedroom he was to share, and whose club he was to attend. There were apparently six or seven clubs belonging to University Hall, each run by one of the

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inmates with a group of attendant satellites whose special preserve it was. Clandon asked Pramp to be ready to go with him to the club at half-past seven, and left him to himself.

At the time named Pramp set out with Clandon, Simmonds, a High Church curate, and two others.

The club proved to be a really elaborate concern with large rooms occupying three storeys, two billiard rooms, a coffee canteen, a properly appointed gymnasium, and from two to three hundred boys all on the premises at once.

Pramp's experiences with the Lads' Club at Oxford soon enabled him to get on with the latter. They were older, they were wittier and more intelligent, but the essentials of the game of bluff and banter, the reiteration of jocularly abusive remarks with regard to their clothing, their faces, their appetites or their feet remained the same.

To Pramp this was simply a game and nothing more, and he played it vigorously. A greater faculty for cheap wit and an acceptable lack of dignity that distinguished him from the other University Hall men soon made him really popular.

By the third night he could always count on being surrounded by a dozen or more boys directly he came into the club, some of whom would stick to him and follow him about all the evening.

His skill at billiards was also useful ; he could sing a comic song, make an amusing speech, and was not above a story about a girl.

It appeared from the first that Clandon disliked Pramp's influence. Pramp would be sitting in a room entertaining a dozen boys with accounts of the adventures of University life, mainly fictitious. In the

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midst of an uproarious conversation Clandon would stroll into the room and on some pretext or other take Pramp away with him to the Private Office, sacred to the young men of University Hall, a Holy of Holies to the boys.

"You know, Pramp," he would say, "one must be very careful with the boys; very careful in anything that one says to them, not to let slip a word that they might interpret as something loose, not quite nice, you know. I don't mean for a moment that one intentionally says such things, but you know the atmosphere of their homes is so perverted that they try and twist anything you say to them into a wrong meaning. So you ought to be very careful in these stories you tell them, never to mention anything about women."

"Did I do so?" said Pramp.

"Oh no, I didn't hear anything of the kind; but I thought I'd better warn you. We never allow any talk about women or girls in the club." Clandon seemed continually on the watch for Pramp to commit himself by some indiscretion. During a particularly exciting game of billiards between Pramp and one of the boys, when the spectators were jocularly indulging in hypothetical bets, and the air was full of "Two to one on Old Pramp," "I'll lay a tenner the old sport 'll get home with a twenty break," "Garn! I back Pramp to get to ninety-nine and stop there," the sombre form of Clandon would be seen hovering in the background, and a private lecture to Pramp on the evils of the gambling spirit in the clubs and the necessity of discouraging any mention of betting, even though it were fictitious, would follow.

On nothing, however, did Clandon, Simmonds and others lay so much stress as on the need for absolute

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teetotalism in the Club. "If you'd had my experience, young man," Clandon, who was only about thirty himself, said one night in the privacy of their joint bedroom, "and seen as many young fellows as I have gone wrong over drink, you would understand that you can't be too often telling them the dangers of it. I shouldn't wonder if the homes of half of these young men are ruined by drink; generally it's the father, but quite often the mother."

"But surely that ought to be about as good a warning as they can have," said Pramp.

"Rather not! Some of them have got it in their blood. One chap I know, awfully decent fellow, had been a member of the club for five or six years, never touched a drop all the time, took to it about a fortnight ago. I bailed him out at Old Street Police Station on a drunk and disorderly charge only yesterday. It's heartbreaking when a fellow you've tried as hard with, as I did with John Stubbings, lets you down like that. My reputation's gone down a lot in the club, I can tell you."

"But do you forbid all strong drink?"

"Absolutely at the club!"

"You've never been drunk yourself, I suppose."

"Of course not. I am a teetotaler."

Too drunk with God, I suppose, thought Pramp, ever to get drunk with anything else! Wise man, Clandon, not to mix his liquors!

Pramp felt discouraged. There appeared to be nothing you could say to the boys without leading them into some danger or other.

The middle-class morality, embodied in the aspirations of the earnest young slummers at University Hall, painted a complete picture of a gloomy and forbidding

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world in which the poor rushed to destruction until they had learnt to know better through imitating the class above them.

This atmosphere of reproach founded on the doctrine of original sin, and tempered with coffee, buns and heartiness, subtly pervaded the club in pleasing contrast to the world without. As a safeguard and defence against the world, which as every one at University Hall was continually dinning into their ears, was incredibly wicked, the boys were treated at the club as if they were wrapped in cotton-wool.

At least that was the ideal. It was rarely realized that the ordinary, healthily indecent talk of boys between sixteen and twenty, driven underground by the black looks of Clandon and others of his kidney, derived strength and interest from the importance attached to it, and took unto itself all the added glamour of stolen apples.

As for drink, the fact that you could not get it or talk about it at the club simply meant that you went to the pub instead. Surely, thought Pramp, if drink is accessible at four places out of every five, what is the good of forbidding it at the fifth and calling yourself virtuous? By shoo-ing it out over your doorstep and then pretending it does not exist, you are only encouraging it to take up its abode next door with women thrown in, at the cost of making yourself cantankerous and unpleasant to the members of the club.

Pramp, however, was not yet ripe for revolt. His behaviour improved at the club, and he even lost some of his popularity by trying to divest his jokes of some of their sexual and alcoholic spice. But his cardinal fault remained: he would try to get to know the boys.

And this was unusual to a reprehensible degree. It



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may be that the claims of friendship with the Almighty are too all-absorbing to permit a wide circle of earthly friends. For the embryo curate does not know his flock. He views them from the outside as the *corpus vile* of his profession, but he does not know them. It isn't done, as Clandon was careful to point out to Pramp. "We are pioneers," he told him. "We are trying to bridge the gulf that separates the rich from the poor. But to do this we must not identify ourselves with the poor. Then we should be of the poor ourselves, and where would be the value of the bridge?"

"But you talk of friendship," said Pramp. "You even invite the more deserving to tea at University Hall; and you work among them."

"Yes, that is what we are here for, to work : to work and to help."

"But you are so selective, you only help the boys."

"Not always ! Some of us who are older try to help the women. We support them through the periodical arrivals of new babies or drunken husbands. It is no light matter, I assure you. The women are so secretive, so defensive. No ! we get little thanks for doing God's work in the East End."

"But don't you find all this practical work bad for your mind ? If you are up to your eyes in good works, they become blind to everything else : to beauty or friendship, for instance."

"Oh, we've no time for women ! And as to friendship, there are the boys. You can't think, Pramp, how close you get to them."

"But you don't ! You tell me yourself that real intimacy with boys would destroy the value of your work—your bridge. Besides, you are too busy helping them : and you are too English and public schoolly



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really to mix ; you want to keep yourselves to yourselves, to preserve your middle-class integrity. All your lives you have gone round the vicious circle of acquaintances tinctured with relations. You don't make friends. How should you ? Friendship requires perseverance, forbearance, practice, not a mere doing of things."

" You don't know what you are saying ; we love our boys. We visit them when they are sick, we bail them out when they are in trouble. We are always working and watching over them."

Pramp too was working and watching. Borne along in the stream of well-doing, he bestowed the light of benevolent cheeriness and an Oxford manner on a large hospital, a police court, a lunatic asylum and Wormwood Scrubbs prison in the space of a week. The visit to Wormwood Scrubbs was the only one he found at all tolerable, because he was not expected to make cheerful conversation with the prisoners.

It was not that he could not talk, but he could not talk about the right things. He was always treading on the thin ice of forbidden topics, and as he was still mortally afraid of going through into the waters of Clandon's displeasure, he tried to keep his mouth shut.

It was, however, with a feeling of deliberate revolt and challenge that he promised one night to sing at a concert to be given by the club " Magpies " on the following evening ; for no University man had ever sung for one of the club concert troops before.

Pramp contrived to keep the thing carefully concealed from Clandon and the rest until the night of the performance.

Singing, of course, in any and every company, at all places and all times, had been one of the most important

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doctrines inculcated into Pramp at Oxford. But like so many men who had been to Keble and thought it was Oxford, Clandon and Simmonds did not know this. The accent of their words was Oxford, but the words were Keble, while the songs were not at all. Clandon thought it undignified to sing before the boys. Simmonds, who was, as has been remarked, very High Church, was inclined to the view that all singing outside churches was to be deprecated.

That a University Hall man should stand up on a stage and entertain boys by making an exhibition of himself, thereby showing that he liked to excite affection and applause among his inferiors, was incomprehensible to them. Now the incomprehensible was synonymous with the abominable, for they possessed all the keen critical faculty of their class.

The Club Hall was crowded to the last inch on the night of the concert. The "Magpies" were closeted in a little room behind the stage, Pramp, anxious to allay all suspicion until his turn came, sitting ostentatiously talking to a mob of boys at the back of the hall.

The songs of the "Magpies" were almost entirely music-hall comics, which, being about a year old, had just filtered through to the East End. "Oh, you Beautiful Doll" and "Have a bit of Jam Jim, Jim Jam, Jam Jim," evoked great applause and thunderous singings of the chorus.

To the surprise of Pramp and apparently every one else one singer came out with "Good-bye, my Bluebell," which, dating from the days of the Boer War, was unanimously voted stale, and was held to constitute a blot upon the otherwise up-to-date escutcheon of the "Magpies."

On the other hand, an indescribably sentimental

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ballad of a somewhat later period wrung many heart-strings. The chorus of the song, which was something on these lines—

“I wonder if you miss me sometimes,  
Miss me when the twilight’s nigh;  
I wonder, dear, if sometimes you remember  
Days gone by.  
I wonder if you know I’m pining,  
Pining for you in despair,  
I wonder if you know my heart is breaking,  
And I wonder if you care ”

brought tears to many eyes, although it evoked feelings of apprehension among some owing to the intrusion of the feminine element.

It was huskily chanted by several hundred voices, as though clear enunciation, involving a raising of the voice, would have been the grossest sacrilege, and produced a most moving effect.

At the close of the subsequent subdued applause the leader of the “Magpies” announced in a few brief words that Mr. Pramp, of University Hall, had kindly consented to favour the audience with a song, and intimated that Mr. Pramp would now oblige.

Pramp got up, marched along the length of the hall, amid tumultuous cheering and cries of “Good old Pramp,” “He’s the lad he is,” and mounted the stage.

In the front row immediately below him he could see the astonished Clandon glowering disapproval, and frowning as if he wanted to amalgamate his eyebrows.

Pramp began by delivering a short homily on the song he proposed to sing, “Jonah and the Whale,” alluding briefly to the well-known work in which the character of Jonah was introduced, and giving a short

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and racy résumé of the story, in which Jonah figured as "our honoured but lugubrious friend."

The song itself was as follows—

1st Verse. Who did, who did, who did, who did, who did, who did  
swallow Jonah? (repeated three times), Swallow Jonah  
down.

2nd Verse. Whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley  
swallowed Jonah (repeated three times), Swallowed Jonah  
down.

3rd Verse. Why did, why did, why did, why did, why did whaley  
swallow Jonah (repeated three times), Swallow Jonah down?

4th Verse. Whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley very  
hung, hung (repeated three times), Very hungry.

5th Verse. Why did, why did, why did, why did, why did whaley  
throw up Jonah? (repeated three times), Throw-ow Jonah  
up?

6th Verse. Jonah dance and kick and pray, and kick and pray in  
whaley's tum tum (repeated three times), In whaley's tummy.

7th Verse. Whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley, whaley very  
sick, sick (repeated three times), Very sick indeed.

Now this song, when you hear it done, is very funny. Only once has it been known to fail, and that was in a Southsea boarding-house. But it must have the proper lugubrious accompaniment, and must receive proper histrionic treatment, necessitating many changes of voice and much realism of gesture from the singer.

On this occasion the effect was stupendous.

Whether it was that the song constituted something of a challenge to that repressive pietism and niceness of taste, with which University Hall men had hitherto been identified, or whether it was the fact that for the first time in the history of the club a song had been sung by a University Hall man, or whether it was the exuberantly flippant attitude of Pramp, or simply the intrinsic merits of the song, or whether it was all of

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these combined or some of them only, the result was that the house rose as one man, Clandon and Simmonds having no better inspiration on the spur of the moment following suit and encored Pramp rapturously.

Pramp was ready enough to give an encore ; had, in fact, arranged it beforehand.

His encore was to be the famous Officers Training Corps song called " Old King Cole." This song gives samples of the typical remarks of the various ranks in the military hierarchy. No song goes with a greater lilt ; no song possesses a more infectious tune ; and the chorus, which is irresistible, runs as follows—

" Beer, beer, beer, said the private.  
Merry, merry men are we ;  
There's none so fair that can compare  
With the boys of the O.T.C."

Now, if Pramp thought at all about the matter, it would have seemed to him that this song was less likely to cause offence than the last. " Jonah and the Whale " might conceivably be regarded as treating sacred subjects in a frivolous light. But the " Boys of the O.T.C.," besides appealing to that well-known sentiment of reciprocal affection between those allied institutions, the Church and the Army (have not the pulpit and the trench come to be regarded as the only alternative professions for those sons of the middle classes who are not thought gifted enough for stock-broking ?), made fun of nothing in particular, but was just a right-down straightforward sort of good hearty song, with delicacy enough even to leave blanks for the major's swearing. In insisting that it is a delicate song enough, I pass by the equivocal interpretations which have been suggested by some of the somewhat ambigu-



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ous exhortation of the quartermaster "to slap it up and down on the wall."

But luck fought against Pramp that night.

It so happened that at that period a song, unknown to Pramp, was well-known to his audience. The chorus began—

"Beer, beer, glorious beer, fill yourselves right up to here" (the paunch being indicated), etc.

This song, needless to say, was rigorously banned at the club.

But the appearance of a University Hall man singing a song which went so far as to mention the beverage three times in a chorus, though without panegyric epithet, was sufficient apparently to subvert the bonds of discipline.

Once Pramp got to "Beer, beer, beer, said the Private," the effect on the audience was magical. They went right off the rails with the song, captured it and made it their own, and, despite stentorian efforts on the part of Pramp and a thumping accompaniment by the pianist, insisted on singing instead the chorus of the more familiar song which spoke of beer and nothing but beer, sang it, howled it, and sang it three times over, before Pramp could get hearing enough to continue with his next verse.

For four verses Pramp struggled on with his song, the babel-like chorus of "beer, beer, glorious beer" recurring with increased strength and frequency on each occasion.

Then he gave it up in despair and retired discomfited, though the applause was tumultuous. The audience broke up in a hubbub. The boys rushed about excitedly shouting for beer and cheering Pramp, who, appalled at the effect of his singing, modestly



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tried to evade notice by keeping as much as possible out of the way. The solvent beer, by its mere mention, appeared to have loosened restraint and cast respect to the winds.

Clandon vainly endeavoured to restore some kind of order; but he could scarcely make his voice heard above the din. With a few exceptions the boys paid no attention to his attempts to exert his authority. One or two, boding the storm which was to follow, attempted to curry favour in advance by ostentatiously forming a little ring round Clandon and Simmonds, as if they expected them to be personally assaulted. They could be heard saying that "they didn't think Mr. Pramp ought to have sung a song like that in the club. He oughtn't really." "It wasn't right of Mr. Pramp." They "couldn't understand how he came to do it, especially him being a College gentleman," and so on.

But these were but a few voices of dissent among the riot of approval and gladness. Pramp with difficulty escaped being chaired back to University Hall, by taking refuge in the lavatory, whereupon the boys, to mark their disappointment, immediately left the club. They did not even stay to say good night to Clandon. This was the severest slight of all, for Clandon's good night, involving a firm shake of the hand and deep look into the eyes, amounted almost to a benediction; it was a sort of rite. With the faithful Simmonds at his side, he locked up the club in a boding and sinister silence.

As they walked back together—Pramp had gone on ahead—"That fellow wants a good talking to," said Simmonds.

"He wants more than that," replied Clandon

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"He must go. He shall never, never enter my club again. If he does, I resign."

On returning to University Hall it might have been observed that Clandon was closeted in close communion for a considerable time with the Chief.

About eleven o'clock on the following morning Pramp was asked to go to the Chief's private room. He went there and found the Chief standing on the hearthrug, legs apart, clerical coat tails gathered up behind his back, with Clandon and Simmonds in two big arm-chairs one on each side of the fire.

Bloomfield, the Chief of University Hall, was in many ways a remarkable man. He had taken a first-class degree at Oxford, and had cut a prominent figure as a violent revolutionary. In his own words, "he had drunk blood," and had made Keble College, notorious for its distrust of the disturbing effects of any kind of thought, almost too hot to hold him.

On leaving Oxford he had taken a post as private secretary to an eminent barrister and politician and seemed well on the way to the House of Commons, for which his talents eminently fitted him, when something in the nature of a Pauline conversion appears to have happened to him.

At all events Bloomfield threw up barrister and politics alike, took Orders, and set his feet to the thorny path of a High Church curate in Poplar.

He was lifted from the ruck of East End ecclesiastics by the gift of speech and an Episcopal uncle. The first helped his sermons to get into people's heads ; the second, into print. He became known.

Charming manners and an appreciable watering down of his undergraduate, political heterodoxy brought him into favour with priest and layman. His early

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revolutionary sympathies were now of great use to him, providing him with a formidable array of anecdotes derogatory to the characters and disinterestedness of leaders of Labour, and a thorough acquaintance with the weak points in the anatomy of the gods of atheism and socialism. He possessed an unexampled knowledge of the weak points in the armour of tub thumpers and secularists, which were most vulnerable to the satiric clerical shaft. He could plumb the shallows of a Socialist speech, and was able to retort with devastating effect upon poor men who spoke of revolution, "Yes, I thought that too when I was younger. But experience has made me alter my views."

But reflection would ascribe the chief element in his success to the skill with which he selected for his eloquent attacks precisely those movements and tendencies which happened to be most unpopular at the moment. Materialists, socialist agitators, secular Sabbatarians, brewers and landlords figured in turn in the pillory of his pulpit, and were duly disposed of.

He retained, however, from his early intellectualist associations a taste for argument, which gave him a fine show of open-mindedness and enabled him fiercely to discuss, without of course admitting, views whose acceptance would abolish alike the justification of his existence and his salary.

It was this assumption of broad-mindedness that chiefly marked him off from his brother clerics. He did not pretend that improper views did not exist simply because they were not his own. He kept up-to-date with the most recent forms of heterodoxy and beat them off the field, thus exhibiting an open-minded modernity which was creditable to the intelligence with which he pursued his ambitions.

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“I want to have a word or two with you, Mr. Pramp,” he began now, “on a rather serious matter. I do not know with what intentions you came to University Hall. Your actions would seem to show that they were not particularly creditable ones ; but I will place the most generous interpretation on them that I can, and try to regard them as thoughtless and ill-advised merely. You know, of course, to what I refer ? ”

Pramp said that he did not, and with a look of regretful surprise as much as to say, “I see, you unscrupulous young devil, you’re going to brazen it out with a show of innocence, are you ? ” Mr. Bloomfield continued—

“You are doubtless aware, Mr. Pramp, that it has always been our greatest endeavour in the University Hall clubs to encourage temperance and self-restraint, and to do everything in our power to discountenance drink and the praises of it. Only teetotal drinks are, of course, sold in the clubs, and the subject of drinking has always been strictly barred in conversation by University Hall men. For all the mention of it that has ever been made in the clubs, at least to our knowledge, no member might have known that such a thing as intoxicating liquor existed. That spirit, you will understand, Mr. Pramp, is something which cannot be lightly come by. It has taken many years to build up !

“Very well ! You write to me from Oxford and ask to be admitted into University Hall. We open our doors to you in perfect good faith, and give you access to our clubs, which you enter with all the prestige and influence that attaches to a University Hall man.

“You were tacitly put upon your honour to maintain that prestige and influence and to behave in the

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way in which University Hall men always have behaved. How did you use this influence, how did you honour this privilege ?

“ You used it to undermine all that University Hall has stood for, all that it has been endeavouring to achieve. You take down the banner of University Hall—the banner of purity and temperance—you cover it with ridicule and trample it in the dust. You question our prohibitions with regard to talk of sex and drink. You aim at everything which will win you a cheap and easy popularity, and you do it by making light of the rules of the clubs. You egg the boys on by precept and example to set at nought the authority of our men. You alienate their affections from the manager of the club, who has made the club what it is, and as a culminating performance you appear at a club concert, itself an unprecedented thing for a University Hall man, and sing a song which glorifies and exalts the one thing the club has always endeavoured to suppress. Mr. Pramp, you have undone in one week, in one night even, the work of several years !

“ As I said, I do not know what your intentions may have been. I hope that I am justified in ascribing your actions to foolishness merely. But you have many lessons yet to learn before you can begin to hope to do any useful work in the East End. You have even more to unlearn.

“ The man who wishes to work in the East End must approach his task in humbleness of spirit. He must not seek continually to thrust himself into the limelight of popularity, which his superior education and social standing can so easily procure him among boys who are prone to cultivate and worship what they think is above them. It is, for instance, easy for him to indulge



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their predilection for loose talking, by painting in attractive colours things against which the club must always set its face. Yet he must not do this. He must think always of how to better, not how to please, the boys under his charge. He must talk on subjects which will interest their minds and not indulge their tastes. Above all, he must pray to God for strength to set himself rigorously against the all too easy path of the middle-class demagogue.

“Mr. Pramp, you have these and many other things to learn. Your conduct has made it impossible for you to learn them here. In a few years’ time you may perhaps come back. At present this is not the place for you.”

“But what have I——?” broke in Pramp.

But Mr. Bloomfield was too good an arguer to waste his talents in arguing with inferiors.

“We need not prolong this conversation, Mr. Pramp. I have said all I have to say, and I can’t listen to any arguments. Good-bye.”

And that was the finish of the East End as a career for Pramp. He passed out of University Hall with diminished head, and the world of social workers knew him no more.

## Chapter 2 : *A Glimpse of Bohemia*

“THE trouble about life at Oxford,” said Lowther, “is that you never get to know anybody.”

“What rot,” replied Pramp; “one knows simply stacks of people. The difficulty is to get them all in.”

“That’s just it. It is because you can’t get them all in, as you so elegantly phrase it, that you don’t really know them. It takes ages to get to know one man, and here one is acquainted with so many that you don’t give a consecutive ten minutes to any of them. Besides, you don’t take the trouble to be civil to people when you know you can so easily replace them if they take offence. You only value things which are irreplaceable.”

“Oh, is that what you mean? Why couldn’t you say so without being so sententious about it? Well, what about it, anyway? What is the remedy?”

“To go on a reading party. Get four or five people together, whom you think you might like if you got to know them, and go off to a remote spot where you can neither get away from them nor exchange them. Of course, when you really found out what they were like, you might be disappointed, but that’s a risk you’ve got to take. Besides, you would find out something about yourself: that is the chief object of friendship, to reveal a man to himself.”

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"You talk as though seeing a man out of Oxford meant seeing a different man."

"Well, doesn't it? The conditions here are unnatural: the stream of life too fast; the atmosphere is congested, overcharged, like the climate."

"You mean?"

"That the climate of Oxford is like a damp bathroom, that its spiritual atmosphere is like a mental hothouse, and that you can't discover a man's complexion if you have only seen him in a conservatory. Review him in the cold light of the outside world and you may make a friend. But the glare must not be too pitiless. It would never do to see Archie, for instance, in Bootle. But transplant him to the country—to Brittany, for example!"

"What about Brittany?" said Pramp.

"Two years ago I was biking with my father in the obscurer parts of the Côtes-du-Nord. We came upon a little island, with about five hundred people on it, a mile or so from the coast. Good hotel, empty in June or July, cooking excellent, Madame complaisant, I mean about omelettes and things. The people, by the way, are practically all women: the men, it seems, are away fishing in Iceland or somewhere. At any rate we never saw any, except a few artists from Paris. And they might have been women!"

"Let's go," said Pramp, "this summer vac.!"

The chosen six were to cross directly term was over, with the exception of Pramp. He was pledged to a week at the Lads' Club Camp. How he fared there we have already seen.

He arrived at Southampton for the crossing on a burning July day, and boarded the ship about four o'clock after the usual bickering with his father

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for having lost all his luggage, which his father must be at the expense and trouble of forwarding.

"So selfish of you, Arthur, to put all this trouble upon other people, simply because you won't take the pains to look after your own stuff yourself."

His father bade him a perfunctory good-bye intermingled with admonitions as to the proper manipulation of French coinage, and turned away before the ship left, betraying unusual sensibility in the avoidance of that gloomy hiatus between scheduled and actual time of departure, a blank to be filled with vacant gaze or conversation on meals, landings, stewards, sea sickness, mechanically manufactured, publishable every word.

Pramp was glad to be going to France. He had only been there once before, a boy of fourteen with his family. His stomach had protested at the unknown food; he had fallen ill, and returned in a fortnight. His experiences of France were mainly olfactory, and his ignorance alike of the language and the land invested the place with what must be described as the glamour of adventure. Also he had heard vaguely of French women.

On the quay of St. Malo with its olfactory reminiscences he discovered he had no time for breakfast if he wanted to catch his train, also that he knew less French even than he had thought. The meagre remnants of French grammar still surviving in his brain, his memory of the nouns ending in "ail" which made plural in "x," and those again which were partial to "s," an unpronounceable word which sometimes meant a stained-glass window and sometimes something else, were so much useless dross upon the platform of Dinard station.

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He entrained, however, for Paimpol, and discovered that the amenities of the Ouest État included four changes and nine hours to perform the requisite hundred miles.

Archie and Waller met him at Paimpol. They boarded a little motor vedette, rounded the harbour point and the island lay full to view, a vista of trees and rocks and cliffs and little white houses standing out among the green.

The time that followed was happily masculine : a time of work and bathing, of bridge and billiards, of cricket and talk ; a time, above all, of talk.

An unprecedented freedom of expression and irreverence of thought, upon which a *milieu* of uncomprehending Frenchmen placed no restraint, lent to conversation a peculiar zest.

The best talk comes from a stimulation, not of mind, but of body. Nothing untrammels the tongue like a good dinner, but the constant supervision of vigilant and understanding inferiors for Hebes in England provides a makeweight of stiffness. Here the excellence of the diet piqued the wit ; the ears of the servitors were shut ; neither God, man, woman or clergyman escaped scathing treatment at the merciless hands of youth, emphatically modern in its ability to penetrate shams, but not the superficiality of its own penetration.

Ball gave the gathering its tone. He possessed an intellect that worked like a fretsaw, cutting, pigeon-holing, cataloguing and Bowdlerizing whatever was presented to it, but lacking the originality to provide materials for its own vivisection. His extraordinarily clear brain and a certain amount of application at school had won for him practically every distinction that the modern public school offers to the intelligent



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who lack athletics. This culminated in the first scholarship at Balliol, where a series of University prizes and exhibitions, culled indiscriminately, had combined to inflate his pride and his pocket. A sceptic by nature he had rapidly knocked the bottom out of every theory, religion, convention or belief that had had the ill-luck to come under his notice. Having effectively scrapped the universe in theory, he had now arrived at the youthful conclusion that the really intelligent position, affording invulnerable armour for controversial purposes, was to have no views. He was propagandist only in this, that disbelieving in everything himself he was eager to reduce others to a similarly interesting state. Aunts said of him, "He wants to fall in love with a really good woman. That will cure him." Conceive the aunts, and you have the man. Unfortunately for the aunts' peace of mind, his views on women were as primitively masculine as his practice was innocuous. A sensualist, he had not the courage of his desires ; but perhaps a good woman, if fallen in love with, cures even views on women.

On the question of women, it may be noted that the timidity engendered by cloistered life at a University induced them all to cry sour grapes. Women were for them not desirable, not because they were not desired, but because they were not attained. They feared to display the gaucheries of their novitiate and wished not to appear ridiculous, not knowing that if a thing is worth doing at all it is worth doing badly. This indeed they knew as regards skating, diving, riding and painting, in which preliminary awkwardnesses are surmounted for the sake of the skill to come ; but love they set apart, failing to recognize it as a pursuit, at best an art, of which the initial stages must be laboured

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through with as much assiduity and clumsiness as mark the pothooks and hangers of the youth of tender years, soon to develop into handwriting. Ball's vast knowledge of the literature of love, of Rabelais, of Bocaccio, of Gil Blas and of Balzac's Contes Drolatiques made him only the more painfully aware of his own inexperience.

Lowther had a heart and more insight, which combined to blunt the lucidity and to modify the crudity of his views, which otherwise resembled Ball's.

Archie, very pink, flaxen-haired, handsome and nineteen, was for taking refuge in mysticism and the outer fringes of religion.

"A state of belief," he said one night, "is not necessarily valueless because you can't understand it. Its merit lies rather in the fact that it does baffle the understanding, like good music. You get so sick of being able to understand things. That is what's wrong with the Merry Widow Waltz, or Dixie Land, or the poems of the woman Wilcox. You can't rest in them because you can see through them."

"But religions are just the same. I can't find any religions that *are* incomprehensible," said Lowther. "You can see through them all. They are either dodges for fleecing the poor, or for killing and torturing people under the pretext of executing God's will."

"What about theosophy and mysticism generally; they take no money from anyone, nor do they proselytize?"

"I've no patience with them," said Ball. "Theosophy and mysticism are God's last ditch. The Godmen, defeated on the orthodox count, take refuge in these hothouse creeds and wreath themselves in a nebulous mist of elusive phraseology. They are like the cuttlefish emitting the ink, or whatever it is they

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do emit, to cover up their traces and mislead those who try to follow them. The stuff they talk doesn't mean anything to them, but they don't mind that as long as it doesn't mean anything to their opponents either. Then they can't be attacked. It's just the same about women. The secret of their charm is that men profess they can't understand them. That's why men make fools of themselves over them just as they do over religion."

"Of course it's easy enough to see that men make fools of themselves over women," said Pramp, "but it is not so easy to see why, until you've tried. That's what's wrong with us. We are always talking about women and never trying them. Women aren't here to be understood or not understood. They're here to be loved."

"Oscar Wilde!" said Waller. "Why don't you go and do it then?"

Just then Marie, the *bonne*, came out into the veranda where they fed, with the omelette. Pramp had curly hair, and she was fond of running her fingers through it. She did so now, and her fingers were very greasy. Pramp shied some bread at her. The feeling he always had in this place of consciously aping the pothouse plus literary attitudes of the eighteenth century was particularly pleasing. Surely this was the sort of thing Fielding used to do.

She laughed. "Vous venez danser ce soir?"

"Mais oui. Vous danserez avec moi?" he cried.

"Bien sûr que oui," and she left them.

"Now you've done it," said Lowther. "Go and love her."

"I'll have a shot," said Pramp. "That's more than you've got the guts for."

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Regularly at half-past eight the island's half-wit struck up with concertina in the "Place." Couples came and danced, danced simply—none of your modern clinging form to form, but jigging at arms' length, with only eyes and hands for bond. There was much free merriment, a safety valve for animal, not for sensual, spirits.

Pramp had watched from his window, often cursing himself as a coward for not having the courage of his longings, oftener for having them, for some traces of the sternly-minded young man with mission to improve still lingered. To-night he watched on the veranda till silence supervened in the kitchen on the clatter of knives, forks and dishes first in action, then in process of being washed up.

Marie came out. A French girl, she achieved, with white silk scarf thrown over her head, an effect that baffles the English servant tribe with expensive outlay on hats, feathers and fans. But her olfactory appeal was inferior. She smelt of garlic. Pramp, however, was impervious alike to garlic and rugged hands.

The steps of a Breton dance are very difficult. Pramp's ineptitude was great, but Marie's patience was greater. Her pride in her capture was greater still. He danced with none other, but so many of the dances were round, involving contact with at least a dozen maidens, that Marie expressed jealous fears and loudly claimed possession.

French girls are masters of eye craft; the eyes of Marie swung and veered like a well-oiled compass with Pramp for magnetic pole. - But he was still too much of a striver, too much the young man of serious endeavour to be content with the lowest rung of the amorous ladder. He carried Marie off for a walk.



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To his delight the dreaded necessity of demanding a kiss was superfluous. Marie's eyes anticipated the demand and skipped it, and he found his lips at last performing their other function.

She sat on his knee, his hands clasped her, and wandered. Later, still in the rôle of the adventurous voyager, he made bold to ask her to visit him that night. She promised, and at midnight a hectic Pramp sat on his bed feverishly listening for footsteps. He had never really expected her, but found his disappointment growing as his expectations decreased, and cursed the faithlessness of women with all the conventional disillusionment of an old hand. He passed a broken night, astonished to find the helplessness of what he considered a keen intellect to master feeling.

The following day brought reaction, which never became remorse. He continued to kiss and flirt with Marie frequently, and this gave him an exaggerated sense of superiority to the others, who professed an amused contempt at his dalliance. He read great quantities of literature, absorbing the major part of Shaw and Wells in the next month. As a result he became a Socialist and was left high and dry on the shore of an arid intellectualism with the last traces of his Christianity washed away, and a keen desire to write. He discussed a proposed novel at table. Lowther laughed unrestrainedly at the suggestion.

"Everything that you could do has already been done *ad nauseam*," he said. "You could only describe the middle class family and the revolt of its offspring against convention and Victorianism; that's all you talk about."

"You haven't an original idea in your head," said



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Ball. "After your first novel, which would be autobiography, you could only plagiarize Wells. Of course that's quite easy. Gas vaguely about muddle in politics and the importance of order and taking hold, spice it with a certain amount of sex stuff, pepper it with epigrams to make it clever, and you have the modern pseudo-intellectual novel."

"Why do you except the first novel?"

"Because any man with an average amount of intelligence who has been to the University and knows the English language can write something that will get called a novel, out of his own reminiscences. Begin by sticking an epigram, preferably original, in the middle of each page and tack them together with enough padding to make them relevant, put in a few women you have known and generalize about them, exploit your own emotions, and put your passions in the shop window, and there you are. In this way every one can write one modern novel, or if he has a double personality, two. No creation is needed."

Their assurance irritated Pramp, but when he tried creative work one hot afternoon two days later he proved completely barren and went to sleep. Two articles written for the *Daily Mail* and an imitation of A.A.M. for *Punch*, none of which were even returned, were the net outcome and final excursions of his literary fervour.

Creative work proving discouraging, he attacked Plato's Republic with great avidity.

One by one the others left. Pramp and Lowther were to stay on alone for a fortnight, at the end of which time Pramp's father threatened to descend from London with project of a bike tour.

For the first few days alone they wallowed in that

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deliciously woeful feeling of self-conscious melancholy that never fails to console the abandoned remnant of a large party. Whether you remain at school when the boys have left, or overstay a week-end party till the Tuesday or Wednesday, or haunt Oxford in the "vac.," the effect is invariably the same. One feeds on reminiscences, visits the spots most richly stored with memory, and thinks to have discovered one's own soul—always a delightful event.

The third day, on descending at cry of "*à table, à table*" from books to dinner, they were intrigued and embarrassed by sight of two new guests—the first since their arrival—facing them at table. They were intrigued because, two days of undiluted companionship having exhausted conversation, the mainstay of acquaintanceship, they had yet to gain their second wind which breathes friendship and renders silence tolerable: hence they were relieved by prospect of fresh material for companionship and the polishing of their French. They were embarrassed at the strange aspect of the new-comers.

The man had eyes and hair. The former brown and large enough in England to betray the poet or the dreamer, but here betokening nothing in particular unless it were belladonna, the latter curling in long ringlets on to his shoulders: subsequent events proved it no wig. Face pale, hands most delicate and be-ringed, and suit of brown velvet induced them both to label him spiritual inhabitant of a country, with a population long since extinct, Bohemia. His voice, rising to a stringy falsetto, might have enlightened their inexperience.

His companion, a woman, seemed beautiful with ample form and full lip. Her features were in shadow,

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accentuated by a large hat. She had come straight from her journey; only a tinge of yellow for white in her eyes, and nails berimmed with black at the ends might have indicated her status and origin.

Their talk was the merest politeness, consisting of inquiries as to route, trains and changing places on the journey, and exclamations at the slowness of the *Ouest État*, the fatigue and heat of travelling, and the incivility of porters. They had come from Paris.

After dinner the couple retired for a walk, with elaborate bows and proffers of English cigarettes, a luxury. The *bonnes* were in a state of clamorous excitement about them, and speculated freely as to whether their titles "Monsieur and Madame Barna" had at any time been sanctioned by the law of the land.

Lowther was manifestly stirred, drank more than conduced to coolness, and later, in their rooms, spoke of the lady as a Venus, a little florid perhaps, but refined. Pramp's recently-acquired experience of women prompted him to qualify these praises on the ground of blowsiness and to affect the dubiously superior. He, too, felt that the morrow was invested with a new interest.

Conversation at lunch was more cordial: the lady, it seemed, desired to swim, and Pramp was full of information as to the best places. At dinner Monsieur was found fortified with time-tables. He made an announcement; business connected with his property took him suddenly to Paris. Madame would, of course, stay behind. He was most distressed to go away and leave Madame so soon after his arrival. Madame would be a little lonely, but he hoped to return in a few days. Would the young Englishmen

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be so kind as to look after Madame—he named her for the first time Linette—meanwhile ?

A little startled, Pramp and Lowther expressed themselves as delighted. It was only later that they remembered to indulge in perfunctory regrets at the forced absence of Monsieur.

“Will you teach me to swim ?” said the lady at once.

“Of course,” they said, “and she would learn small cricket and join them at their English tea.”

“Oh yes ; she would become quite an English squaw.”

They were not present at Barna’s departure, having retired to discuss their new responsibility. They took it seriously : Lowther was for teaching her to catch a cricket ball English fashion, and Pramp wondered if she could be instructed in the English language. What was more important to him just then was that she should instruct him in the language of love. He had had enough of theory : he wanted practice.

Lowther advised caution. “Don’t be a damned fool,” he said. “You’ll get snubbed, and she’ll go bleating to her husband. Or perhaps you’ll find her too willing ; she’ll compromise you and still go bleating to her husband.” He vaguely indicated blackmail.

“Oh ! of course it’s a risk,” said Pramp, “but one must do something. We’re always soaking in this stuff about love, but we never do anything. I suppose you’ve got a vague expectation at the back of your mind that a woman will come to you of her own accord one day while you are dreaming over your pipe, and say ‘Love me.’ She won’t. It’s the penalty of being male that you’ve got to go and look

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for her. You and I are libertines in literature and monks in practice. I don't want to read another word about other people's women, till I've found out that there are women for me too."

"Well, go quietly. I think there's something doing myself, but there's no need to rush it."

"Well, I'm prepared for the risk." Pramp had drunk wine. "Why not? If I do get into a mess, I'm prepared to take the consequences. But I bet I don't. There's too much of the middle class bourgeois about me, to let me do anything imprudent. But it's about time one had a shot. Life's so flat. Nothing ever happens. We try to make believe that our discussions and reading and all that are the real thing. Not a bit. They are makeshifts. All the time they are preparing us and training us for an event that never comes. One must have one's own experience as a touchstone, then you can measure other people's; otherwise you just float vaguely. That's why all our gas about love and pleasure is so barren—like an apple with no juice."

Pramp, undertaking a mission on behalf of verbose but virgin undergraduates, began to regard himself in a Crusader-like rôle. The thought of personal pleasure did not seem to touch his prospective relations with Madame. He was to embark upon a voyage of experience, as a duty. He grew sententious at the thought.

"Life," he went on, "may be regarded as a discipline or an opportunity. In the first case we shall be obsessed by the oppressive gravity of our mistakes, in the second by the glorious possibilities of our experiments."

"Oh, dry up," said Lowther, and went to bed.

Both were a little startled when Madame suggested almost directly after lunch the next day that they



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should go to bathe. French people are accustomed to treasure their digestions, works of art to be allowed to realize themselves unhurried and unhindered, so that for most a full three hours must elapse between meal and immersion.

They delayed her for an hour, and then started for a place where the water was known to be shallow, and the bottom sandy. She could swim a little, she said, but needed assistance.

On arriving they deposited her towel and costume upon the beach behind a sheltering rock, and made away to undress behind another. She showed surprise. "Why do you leave me, ungallant men?" she said, and followed after.

Lowther, however, preferred privacy to the spectacle of beauty disrobing. He betrayed the dour courage of the Briton, impervious to blandishments, and strode sternly to refuge round a jutting rock. Pramp stayed to parley. He spoke of English propriety. "It wasn't done" was the burden of his remarks; but feelings of primitive male disliking to have his privilege of being the hunter usurped, rather than outraged respectability, prompted him in the end to follow Lowther, with sound of mocking laughter in his wake.

In the water it became apparent that "she swam a little," only in imagination. She summoned Pramp to support her and clung to him. But whatever may be the claims of the bays of Naples or of Genoa to be Love's potent fluid, a medium to accentuate the passion, as the electric current of a boy's shocking coil is keener in the basin of water, the colder Atlantic fringing the island boasted no such simple. Pramp felt cold as the sea, and disdained the caresses he knew to be proffered. A woman's body felt in water and

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bathing-dress turns the thoughts to cod, not Cupid.

The bathe finished—and her toilette, seen to be of the scantiest, blue dressing-gown, given to sagging, and Breton shoes—she spoke of a small cottage close by, taken and furnished by M. Barna, whither they intended moving on his return, and offered tea.

Should they go? Pramp had resumed his theories with his trousers, and with them the reflection that they were still only theories. He was still eager to materialize them. The cottage, at least, would give the appearance and perhaps the reality of intimacy.

Lowther acquiesced, but spoke little. Unwilling to admit that he had received a shock to his propriety, an admission unknown as yet in the world's history, and feeling the inevitable effects of such a shock, including inability to talk, he made a virtue of his disinclination, and assumed a boorish sullenness, clearly intended to imply to the woman her sin against taste. He retired to the drawing-room of the cottage, pretty and clean enough, to study French magazines; Linette prattled to Pramp in the kitchen, and she was still in her dressing-gown.

He scarce dared to ask her for a kiss: the question seemed an insult to her readiness. Before he could summon the courage she was at his lips. He held her in his arms, as she kissed him passionately. Her eyes glowed. Her dressing-gown fell away, revealing her breast. He felt repelled, she was outstripping him, but politeness and his Crusader's desire for experience forbade him to push her away. She pointed to the sofa, but he to the open drawing-room door, and on the pretext of seeing what Lowther was doing went into the drawing-room and stayed there till Linette brought in tea.

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People do not read events in other people's eyes in anything like so marked a degree as they are in literature supposed to do. But Lowther had heard noises, and Pramp's pale face confirmed the obvious. It was Pramp's turn to be shocked into silence, and Lowther was obliged to assume a tea-table sociability by carrying on a constrained discussion with Linette on French literature.

She exhibited more knowledge than was to be expected, especially of Pierre Louys, Felix Champsard and similar authors ; but her eyes were on Pramp, and he, he was not even fascinated, simply frightened. He longed to go. She seemed hurt at their somewhat lame excuse about returning to work, but they left her.

Pramp described the incident to Lowther with a wealth of detail on their way back. He could not determine, he said, whether his feeling of revulsion was stronger than his wonder at the feeling. Both were strong. It was as though a child's desire for jam had been nauseated by spoonfuls crammed into his mouth to cloak an aperient powder.

Lowther reiterated the need for caution. They must avoid the woman.

We only listen to advice when we cease to need it, the fact that it appears rational to us being the measure of its superfluity. Pramp's feelings rendered his friend's admonitions unnecessary. Already he had visions of an impending and vengeful Barna : the woman might, probably would, do the Potiphar's wife trick. They must concert a plan of action against her.

So ended the first episode of the Crusader, in a complete facer for experience.

Dinner was strained to a degree. The woman shut her eyes to what her intuition must have revealed,

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took her stand on the intimacy of the kitchen instead of on the formality of the dinner table, and caressed with hand and voice.

It is difficult to check a woman's passion without wounding her feelings, and both Pramp and Lowther so hated giving pain that they would be sure to make the lady suffer.

A sudden fall in the temperature whether of the passions or the atmosphere, especially if amounting to frost, requires that the objects upon whom the temperature normally operates should receive delicate handling and protection, be they women or water pipes. Pramp lacked the requisite delicacy of touch ; in other words, he failed to protect the water pipes, and floods of tears ensued. She forced them to downright rudeness, and they had to state plainly that they preferred to view the sunset alone.

For the next two days they snubbed her unmercifully, until in Pramp an abatement of the shock received masqueraded as a feeling of compunction at their ungentlemanly conduct to a woman, and he began to relent.

But she certainly was intolerable. The expert rapidity with which she had skimmed the earlier stages of desire had balked her of the later. She blamed her too great experience, and finding it difficult to arouse their sympathy for pretended injury received, grew vindictive and fell to annoying. Quickly she probed the limitations of "*la flegme britannique*." An Englishman indulges in gaiety only in strictly regulated doses, generally taken after meals : gaiety is for him definitely a departure from the normal. But she would have them always at frolic, would come behind them writing, place her hands over their eyes or close



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their books. An exasperated Lowther one day hurled his book at her with intent to hurt : it missed, but she scored an advantage in his manifest regret. She descended to tricks which are obsolete outside preparatory schools : salt was substituted for their sugar ; the lid of the pepper-pot was unscrewed ; their slippers were hidden, and their bathing-dresses sewn up.

A man is always at his worst when wrangling with a woman ; he loathes the pettiness involved, and is eager to be done with it, but she willingly prolongs the bout, finding in such strife her habitual element.

"When men live together," said Lowther, "they mutually map out the corns on one another's feet, and carefully tread between. But this damned woman maps them with equal care for the joy of standing on them. For rank bad taste she's unrivalled. She's a choice flower of the Paris Whitechapel, whatever it is."

"I agree, but we are awfully Pharisaical about her, not on the moral count but just snobbish, because her manner grates and she eats peas with a knife."

"Well, why not ? We can't help our feelings. If one has the misfortune of being born an aristocrat, one should at least claim the privilege of being a snob."

"In compensation."

"Yes, because it's only our damned refinement—vener, I know, but to be reckoned with—that prevents us from regarding her as just a woman and enjoying her, instead of as an ill-bred drab."

"Another sample of the truth that Oxford is a device for providing a man with expensive tastes without the means of gratifying them. We spurn this poor lady, but can't afford a better," said Pramp.

He made efforts to renew intimacy, but at every approach his fear, refinement or whatever it was, inter-



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vened. Fear is the greatest bulwark of chastity, and was potent till Barna's return.

Linette either kept quiet on events in his absence, or he thought it better to disguise her disclosures ; he was courtesy itself, thanked them graciously for looking after his wife, dispensed great quantities of English cigarettes, wept copiously at table at his joyful reunion, and shortly after removed with Linette to the cottage.

Now, at least, it seemed to Lowther and Pramp that their chastity would remain unassailed by the vicious woman. She appeared only at meals, which they still took at the hotel, and was propriety itself in behaviour, a propriety which was now anxious to pass her off as a blue stocking. She talked literature with more verve than knowledge with Lowther, betrayed a smattering of scientific words, and spoke vaguely of her student days. A pose, of course, which soon revealed itself as but another versatile shaft winged from her variegated quiver. Lowther's steel-blue eyes, square-cut chin, and the reserve which cloaked his shyness, had piqued her interest, and his assumption of chastity her desire. She possessed in a high degree that capacity, common to every woman, of reading between lines that are not there. She mistook Lowther's "flegme britannique" and apparent imperviousness to her charms as a mask to hide his glowing passion. Her continental conception of the English male as silent, reserved, distrustful of emotion, still more of its expression, given to biting his lips frequently till they bled, and to chewing his moustache as an outlet for passion, fitted Lowther admirably.

A stream of glowing letters white-hot from the pen followed, in which she strove to encircle the two of them in an atmosphere of clandestine intimacy by

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attributing to Barna a jealousy, likely to issue in homicide were she discovered, and insisting on the strictest secrecy as essential to the safety of them both.

Her love was his to trample on was the impression she strove to convey ; she spoilt it by dragging in her body and attendant desires. Lowther trampled and gave no sign.

This was too much for Pramp. As Linette's veer Lowtherwards had wounded his vanity, so Lowther's neglect wounded his chivalry, or so he called it.

A man cannot bear to find what is cheap to another dear to him. In these circumstances he may bring down the price of the goods in question for himself, or put it up for his neighbour. Pramp was for the former course. The pendulum swung again, and the Crusader rôle was resumed. Now she even seemed desirable.

His attentions increased markedly. They seemed to excite no sentiment in Barna beyond amusement, while she, confronted with a rigid politeness on Lowther's part, was glad enough to play on a second string.

She could hardly contain her delight that Pramp had issued from his shell of repulsion, and reciprocated her propensity for cheap horse-play, bread throwing, gramophone record breaking, hair pulling and futile rioting generally. Her knowledge of the slang of Montmartre was encyclopædic. Pramp expressed a desire to be instructed.

"All right, my sweet, I'll learn you," she said.

"Well then, what does '*foutez-moi le camp*' mean ?"

"Oh, 'Clear out of the bl——y way.' But there's a much choicer expression than that."

"Tell me."

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"Oh, I couldn't. 'Ne faut pas choquer les gens convenables.' When we are all alone, I'll tell you."

"But we never are. You've always got Barna or some half-boozed commercial traveller round you."

"Poor little thing. Did he want to be alone with me? Let him come to my cottage early one morning, and I'll teach him all the most *recherché* expressions, and anything else he would like to learn."

"Sounds all right, but what about Barna?"

"Oh, that's easy enough. You know, he's a sensitive old bounder. When he gets the sulks, he comes over to the hotel here and sleeps by himself. He hates it, too, at the time, but he comes back all the fresher for his night on the lonesome."

"Puts a fresh edge on things when they get a bit blunted, I suppose."

"That's it; and it's easy enough to offend him. I can do it as easy as winking. He rather likes it; he takes a satisfaction in his own sulky feelings, and goes off in a tantrum. Look here, I'll arrange a row with him to-morrow night. And you come round early in the morning."

"Right you are," said Pramp. "I'll turn up."

He could scarcely sleep the next night for his excitement. He had not heard Barna come into the hotel, but did not lose faith for a moment in Linette's genius for creating scenes; she could send Barna packing out of the house, a simmering old cauldron of offended dignity whenever she chose, and he flattered himself that she would choose for him.

He rose about six, and walked the ten minutes to the cottage. He was full of eagerness. Linette would open the door to him in her dressing-gown, and this time he would do his best to expunge his former stoical

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indifference to the charm of that attire. He remembered a remark, he thought it was Belloc's, to the effect that the first time a man sees his wife in curl-papers and a red dressing-gown his love is automatically extinguished. Omit the curl-papers; read simply woman for wife, and for extinguished you may substitute inflamed: so he thought and knocked softly.

He waited. No answer. He knocked again, and at the end of what seemed at least twenty minutes, and was probably five, he heard steps. Bolts were undone, the door opened, and he saw, not a bewitchingly voluptuous form in dressing-gown with a slang dictionary in her hand, but Monsieur Barna, robed in long white night-gown, the notoriously thin skins of the Frenchman showing meagrely below like sticks propping spindle-like shanks; on top a lugubrious face, all eyes, as it seemed, in which astonishment struggled with the lees of sleep. For the first and only time within the history of man, or at least of Englishman, Barna was known to forget his manners.

"What do you want?" he said.

Pramp was nonplussed. Visions of duels floated before his imagination. What could he say? Vaguely he murmured something about taking a morning walk, passing by, and calling to see if they were up. His French must have been quite unintelligible. Barna said that neither he nor his wife were up yet, or anything like it. His looks conveyed the surprise which his tongue withheld, and he banged the door in Pramp's face.

Pramp was lucky enough, on his return, to find that Marie alone of the household was yet downstairs, and took full advantage of the tranquillity pervading a household still fast asleep. Thus even early rising has its uses.



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Pramp never got to the bottom of this rebuff. A word alone with Linette revealed greater power of fencing on her part than one would normally have attributed to her, and to his surprise she denied herself the lengthy explanation with the opportunity it offered of exhibiting herself in a heroic and connubially virtuous rôle, which he had expected. She neither pleaded inability to pique Barna, nor confessed to sudden access of virtue. She resisted even the attractive portrait of herself locked in a cupboard by an irate husband, who stood sentry over her. She simply said she had "forgotten all about it." The palpable mendacity of the subterfuge smacked of genius. There is no point in convicting a woman of untruth, when you not only know she lies, but know that she knows that you know, for if a woman does not mind being detected in an untruth there is no point in detecting her.

But Pramp was a bourgeois, and a bourgeois can always persuade himself that he does not want what he cannot get. In this he is admirably adapted to life, and survives where men of soul succumb.

Pramp grew sadly indifferent to the moods of Linette. The glowing river of passion trickled away into the reed beds of complacency. He sat beside her at table and suffered her hand in his without a thrill either of desire or distaste. He almost took pride in his own want of feeling. Had not Lowther and himself now ransacked the vaunted spice chests of Bohemia, probed them to their depths, proved their famed delights to be but dust and ashes, and remained unscathed? And all this in three weeks!

Unfortunately for their complacency new arrivals gave indications of the existence of other drawers to be



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opened in pleasure's bureau before they could count themselves the ideal Dorian Grays, equipped at all points in the panoply of experience.

Three friends of Barna with one lady in tow arrived one day from Paris. Much of the Barna type, with long hair reaching to the shoulders and clad in irreproachable garb of a cut and stripe too pronounced to dub them merely smart, they were the first French young men of fashion to be presented to the aspirants' after-experience. Gaston and his brother René were Paris students, fair, good-looking and twenty.

Gaston gave evidence of possessing a substratum of intelligence beneath the fop's veneer. Raymond announced himself as the manager of the Paris Coliseum, surely a lucrative job, though whether such a job existed Pramp never discovered.

These people proved so fascinating that Pramp, at any rate, abandoned most of his work. He would sit about with them over interminable meals, passing from *déjeuner* to coffee, from coffee to liqueurs, from liqueurs to an English tea following a hurried bathe, and then—after a walk down to the little port, where *apératifs* were sipped, as they watched the vedettes arrive with news of the world and the gossip of Paimpol—to dinner at the hotel, followed by *digestifs* and more liqueurs.

The Frenchmen seemed to exist simply to eat, to be amused at nothing at all (a deflated tennis ball and an unstrung racket kept them rapturously excited for a whole afternoon), and to indulge in shady conversation. The contrast with the English students was complete. The latter spoke continually of theory, doctrine and points of view, while the Frenchmen contented themselves with women, wine and laughter. The English-

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men exfoliated theories about God. The Frenchmen attended Mass. The English indulged in serious conversation about the theory of production and the nature of beauty: Gaston, who alone sometimes listened, preferred the practise of reproduction and the beauty of nature, especially female nature.

As he remarked one day, "You people talk about everything and have experience of nothing."

"You, on the other hand, profess to know about everything, and talk about nothing," retorted Pramp. "What is the good of all this experience of the world you say you have had, if it leads to nothing but these silly gibes about the boot boy's mistress, or heavy discussions on the comparative merits of the *ménage* here and at the 'Hotel Lucas'?"

"But we don't know everything. It's you who are so crammed full of knowledge, academic knowledge that is. You can't see life yourselves for the number of other people's spectacles that you insist on sticking on to your noses to blink through. We, for instance, know how to enjoy ourselves, while you from all accounts think a woman is a kind of dossier to file rival theories in. You are philosophers, or say you are. But your philosophy only deals with philosophies about life, never with life itself. You know what other people have thought about pleasure, but you don't know how to enjoy yourselves. You may know everything about everything, but I'm very much afraid that you don't know anything else. We know some of the other things."

This sally evoked applause. Pramp was tempted to agree, but could not throw up the sponge without a struggle.

"But you're simply wasting a good intelligence," he

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said. "You let fly some silly irrelevant remark whenever anyone propounds a theory and so make real discussion impossible. One just can't talk decently when you are about."

"You think I am incapable ?"

"I don't know that, but you fight shy of it : you regard all serious talk as an opportunity for making witty remarks. Now I am all against heavy men who talk portentously about things that don't matter, such as tramways, dynamos or time-tables. But that's no reason why one shouldn't talk seriously about things which do matter : God, life, women and conduct. You suffer from a sense of humour which has run riot. If all religion is bad, the worship of humour is as offensive as any other form. Yet you Paris people regard the world as a temple of humour, with your friends as communicants and yourselves as high priests.

"Now the anecdotal is the lowest form of humour, but you find it irresistible. It debauches you like strong wine. For instance, when we are discussing the defects and merits, if any, of monogamous unions and the family system, you intrude with a story of a man with a glass eye and a wife in each of five different towns, who was eventually unmasked because the stream of one-eyed children in so many different places and of about the same age evoked suspicion. When we discuss Kant's speculations as to the potency of mind to know matter, you introduce his mistress's speculations as to the impotence of his body. When we debate whether considerations of the happiness of the greatest number are the cause of morality, or whether our ultimate moral conceptions condition our estimate of happiness, you propound as an analogy whether the appearance of intelligence in women is the cause of

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their taking to spectacles, or whether their taking to spectacles is the cause of their appearing intelligent."

"And so you think I have never studied philosophy?"

"Have you?"

"I took a scholarship therein at the Sorbonne. I founded my moral theory on a nicely calculated and perfectly consistent amalgam of the tenets of the Intuitionists and the common sense of the Utilitarians, and I discovered that it had no reference whatever to my theory of life, which is the pursuit of pleasure. I live to enjoy myself. I want as much as I can reasonably expect to get, and I deny myself nothing. Philosophy as a highly developed form of mental gymnastics is valuable, I admit; but only as that. After a time I got beyond the need for mental gymnastics, just as one gets beyond the time for playing football."

"But the pursuit of pleasure is so dull. It becomes an intolerable servitude. Pleasure should occur incidentally when you are actively engaged in the pursuit of something else. The artist in stone decorates constructions, he does not construct decorations; and the artist in life lets his aims bring him pleasure instead of aiming at what pleases."

"What would you have me do, then?"

"Devote yourself to some cause. Help the world forward."

"Proselytize, in fact! It is not worth while; it is so easy to convert people! You can always propagate a propaganda if you have the proper geese."

"Oh, do stop making funny remarks and be serious for once."

"Then stop talking philosophy."

"Why, philosophy isn't funny!"



## A GLIMPSE OF BOHEMIA

"Yes, it is ; not only futile but funny."

"Why, on earth ?"

"Because, as you will presently realize, it is only the serious things in life which are funny."

"Hullo ! Been reading G. K. Chesterton ?"

"No ! It isn't an idle paradox. Why is it that pomp, dignity, pretentiousness and self-importance in all ages rouse the satirist's mirth ? Because they pride themselves on being serious. Why is it that we all laugh at parsons ? Not because they are funny, but because they are not. Why are judges and kings so funny ? Because they take themselves seriously. Why were the suffragettes an object of ridicule ? Simply because perfectly seriously and sincerely they devoted themselves and all their energies to obtaining a perfectly serious end. Therefore the suffragettes roused our laughter. And this was not the humour of the old comic paper caricature of the unsexed woman in spectacles, with a tweed skirt and a bun of hair. That caricature was never merited, and is now quite played out. But there is a comic imp that laughs over the shoulders of all fanatics, so that the more serious a suffragette is, the more funny she is, unless circumstances make her tragic. If a martyr is killed, of course he ceases to be funny. But that is only because death is not really serious.

"What, again, is more excruciatingly funny to the properly trained observer than the spectacle of women sitting in a row in a bus ? They are funny just because they are so solemn, and sit there quite solemnly and fatuously doing nothing, and looking at nothing. If they laughed, they would cease to be funny. Men in rows are, or would be, equally funny, only they bury their faces in papers.



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"Finally, why is the man who fails to see a joke so much funnier than the man who makes it? Simply because he is the only serious person there. That is the secret of the funniness of Scotchmen. And so when I hear people taking perfectly serious subjects like the constitution and structure of reality quite seriously, I am all the more amused. What could be more amusing than the followers of Bertrand Russell solemnly discussing the existence of purple quadratic equations? Yet that is one of the most important subjects in the world lying at the root of the problem of the ultimate nature of matter.

"And so you may say that I am a pragmatist in so far as I believe that thought was meant for action and not for thinking. There are things which should be taken seriously, I grant you: the collapse of a collar stud, the breaking of a boot lace, the folding of a pair of trousers; but these the world calls trivial."

"And you," said Pramp, "are what the world calls a dilettante."

"If a dilettante means not being serious enough to adopt a definite profession, I agree. I am not afraid of a word. I prefer to call myself a gentleman, a gentleman being a person whose mind is not warped by concentration on any special line."

"You desire no serious pursuits or study? No core round which to build your time?"

"Life itself is a sufficient study and enjoyment. Anything that leads one from the enjoyment and observation of life is not a study but an idle diversion."

"In fact, you think you are wasting your time whenever you are not wasting it?"

"No, I never think about it at all. That is the only form of wasting time I know."

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"All very ingenious! But surely you must take things seriously sometimes?"

"I do, but regard it as a lapse. Success in life is to live on the surface, not to dive below it. It is difficult, of course. At times one grows heavy and sinks below; excess of information in particular makes one heavy, also the possession of a wife; but as an ideal banish thought!"

"And what is left?"

"Love and laughter. What more could you want? Love those women who will let you and laugh about those who won't."

Even Lowther was impressed. Certainly Gaston seemed an expert in living up to his philosophy. With Barna, Gaston, Raymond and René adding their voices in consolation or dispute to the perpetual duet, rarely harmonious of the two ladies, an appalling din was continually maintained in the erstwhile placid veranda of the little hotel.

Their restlessness was no less remarkable than the trivial objects on which it sought to appease itself. They would dispute with the greatest heat on the alternatives for an afternoon's pleasure, a row, a sail, a lounge on the rocks, or a lounge in the hotel, the sipping of absinthe at the "Hotel du Port" or at the "Hotel Lucas," a game of backgammon or of vingt-et-un. At dinner they solemnly drew lots for the privilege of the ladies' persons for the night.

A brilliant scheme emanating from the brain of Gaston was the establishment of competitions among the village youthful. A table was set up in the Place, behind which these solemn revellers ranged themselves, with Pramp and one or two other appendages as judges. On the other side gathered the whole

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juvenile population of the island with parents in the background, interested and approving when the human was allowed to peep through the parent veneer, suppressive and disapprobatory when they remembered their parenthood. The competitions were various rather than original, prizes, first, second and third, being offered for the ugliest face pulled, the boy who could spit furthest, the best song sung or story told.

The efforts were indescribably poor. The total resultant amusement, however, was enormous. Peals of laughter greeted the face pullings of each applicant; the village went off its head with delight when the spitting prize was won by a little girl; and Barna, kind-hearted libertine, found it did violence to his feelings for any comely child to depart disappointed of a prize. Any reasonable effort met with half a franc unless the author was entirely unpleasing. As a method of selecting children the competition was a success, and with yells of joy the most favoured youngsters were carried off to the dinner table. Here the spectacle of them imbibing *vin ordinaire* stimulated the jaded interest of the sensation seekers. The ladies declared the children adorable, smothered them with chocolates and caresses, and affected indifference to all the attractions of adult maleness, as compared with the charms of their *chers gosses*.

But the island was scandalized. The better elements asserted themselves, and a deputation waited on the island mayor at midnight, urging him to expel the plague of Parisians. A night-capped head projected from upper windows (a second was discerned behind, betraying the head of mayoral spouse), protested inability to take action till the morrow. The reformers departed baffled, but on the morrow the gen-

## A GLIMPSE OF BOHEMIA

darmes were sent for. But the mainland town boasted but one, and he was away. In a week he returned and crossed in great importance, and the vedette to the island with innumerable bags and papers, and two satellites. But the Parisians had forestalled him. A new excess in the interval had secured their departure, without the interference of the State.

Having drained the wine bottle and found the desired effects still sadly to seek, Barna had hit upon ether as the quickest, the pleasantest and the most *recherché* mode of intoxication. Purchased in liquid form, it was inhaled from a bottle, and he assured the Englishmen that as a nepenthe it put the boasted delights of morphia and opium to shame. Nor were its effects evil.

One night Gaston and Barna locked themselves alone in Barna's room at the hotel for indulgence in this delight. The Englishmen occupied a kind of loft up a ladder attached to the hotel, but shut off so that the only means of entering the hotel was through the front door, which was barred for the night. About midnight both were awakened by a sound as of horses galloping in the main building. Rushing to the head of the ladder leading to the loft, they beheld a vision of white poised on the window-sill of Barna's room. It shrieked aloud (falsetto), leaped and bumped with a clang on to the tin roof of the veranda. At the same moment the front door opened and Marie, also in a night-gown, rushed out, saw Pramp on the loft stairway, ran to him, and straightway fainted in his arms. Clouds of smoke came from the window of Barna's room, and soon the whole population of the hotel was gathered jabbering on the veranda. Finally came

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Raymond and René, carrying Gaston senseless in their arms.

For a long time nobody could get anything out of anybody. Barna bleated disjointed bits of information, mingled with complaints about the pains in his leg, and René, who had spent part of the night looking through the keyhole of Barna's room, supplied the gaps.

It seemed that about midnight, having inhaled ether until they were as drunk as lords and as fuddled as pigs, they began to squabble about Linette, Gaston asserting that she was the same woman Barna had had last summer, with her hair dyed a different colour, and proving his assertions by swearing to an identical birth-mark which appeared upon the knees of both ladies, Barna asking him how the devil he knew what was on the knee of Madame Barna, and in his excitement upsetting the bottle of ether. Too fuddled to remember that he must not strike a light, Gaston lit a match to find the bottle, and the room was in a blaze. Barna sought escape by jumping from the window. Gaston, with a dash of altruism in his composition, stumbled to the door to unlock it and warn the house. His uncertain hands fumbled with the bolt so long that he was severely burnt before he could open the door for René, Raymond and others to rush in and, after a struggle, to extinguish the flames with rugs and water.

The story was abruptly brought to a close by bleatings from Barna, who asseverated he had broken his leg. To the general surprise he really appeared to have done so, and Linette, seizing the golden opportunity to manufacture a scene before a large audience, threw her arms round his neck, and with streaming eyes assuring the crowd that he was her own dear husband, that she alone would nurse him and that she



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would never leave his side. Pramp and Lowther, who were getting hardened, went to bed.

The following day a mournful cavalcade wound its farcical way to the port. First came attendants and *bonnes*, with stacks of luggage on wheelbarrows. Then two litters: Barna in the first, weeping sentimental tears at the thought of parting from his *chers anglais*, Linette at his side, weeping more tears because it was the thing to do and circumstances were favourable, and from time to time daubing an eau-de-Cologne handkerchief on his forehead, usually making a bad shot and putting it in his eyes, as the litter bumped and jolted. Behind Gaston, his face pale, for he had been badly burnt, but still retaining sufficient spirit to try and talk like Charles II on his deathbed. Then Raymond and René arm-in-arm. These two were suffering from an excess of affection just now, a reaction from a fierce altercation in the morning culminating in mutual scratchings, as to which of them had really had the glory of putting out the fire and saving Gaston's life.

Finally a heterogeneous mob of villagers of all kinds rejoicing in the discomfiture of *le type de Paris*, occasionally throwing mud at Linette, with the usual bourgeois dislike for one who had flouted the conventions. From the windows spectators gazed down with moral eyebrows duly lifted. Only Pramp and Lowther laughed. So far had their education proceeded.

"What about the serious things being funny now," said Pramp.

"Behold the vindication of morality and the Nemesis that waits on wrongdoers," said Lowther. "So do the gods fight always on the side of temperance and the marriage tie."

## Chapter 3 : *An Idyll*

PRAMP'S next experiment in the art of love was Dorothy. He met her at the Gordons' dance, to which he had been invited by Mrs. Rolf. Mrs. Rolf had three daughters still unmarried, and though the eldest was wellnigh beyond hope, she was still doing her best for the second and third, and could afford to lose no chance.

Pramp was under no illusions about Mrs. Rolf. "Oxford society is peculiar matrimonially," he was careful to point out to his friend Jimmy. "The prospective husband, even when he is a star of the first water, is not fixed ; he is transitory, a sort of comet. And his transit is brief : he is only above the horizon for four years, thence passing into the outer darkness of post-Oxford society. All the more important, then, to catch him in transit ! A North Oxford matron must hunt with even more speed than caution."

"Dances, I suppose, are one of the snares," said Jimmy, who did not dance.

"Yes, but we get hardened. One gets so much practice that most of us manage to steer a clear course between the smiles of the daughters and the wiles of the mothers, and to go through our four seasons without permanent disablement from either."

"And the daughters ? "

"Oh, they persist : each new generation of freshers

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relights the flame of hope. Some of the more homely have been at it for years, going on for ever, like the brook, you know; others come and go; they just stay."

"It is very sad to think of them," said Jimmy, who had a tender heart.

"It is! Don't go to dances, and your emotions won't be harrowed. They cluster there in swarms."

The Gordons' dance was, however, a different sort of affair from the common rout of semi-matrimonial functions. The reputation of the learned professor stamped it from the first. Its appeal and invitation alike were addressed to the illuminated of head as well as of feet. Bald pates were to be seen, who performed not at all. Morris dancing showed its cloven hoof. The waltz was revived, and gawky scholars thumped the floor at arm's length round dismayed partners, consumed by a sweating anxiety to avoid their feet. Were it not for a leavening of skilled young ladies, imported by Lady Gordon from London ballrooms, one had doubted its being a dance at all.

Pramp looked in vain for the well-known North Oxford performers. Espying one of the Rolf girls, he booked three dances and asked for introductions. Of the numerous names that figured on his programme that night Dorothy's alone emerged into importance.

When Phyllis introduced him to her school friend he became aware of a demure little figure, all pink save for black eyes and coally-black hair. Timid, with an arch smile, a clinger perhaps on acquaintance, she had clearly strayed into modern society, a heroine from the works of a lady novelist of the last century.

The first dance, a waltz, revealed her dancing as execrable. They had one more: they sat it out and

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he persuaded her to cut another. They sat on the stairs in full view of the world. There was nothing for it but conversation. Pramp rang the changes on the topics of Oxford small talk with the speed of an expert. Eights, schools, 'Varsity cricket passed with rapid survey.

Her eyes betrayed that her interest was elsewhere.

Pramp thought it was time to be clever, and plied her with epigrams, the only way then known to him of storming the outer fortifications of a lady's heart.

"I say, let's sit out another dance."

"I really don't think I ought. I'm engaged to a tall, thin man, with big feet and spectacles."

"Ought," said Pramp. "What does 'ought' matter? If the word 'ought' means anything at all, it ought to be excluded from the dictionary. Why not do what you like, for a change: stay here and flirt with me?"

"How do you know I do like that? And I certainly mustn't flirt."

"But you are flirting now, with your eyes."

"How dare you say that! I never use my eyes like some girls do."

"But you are making eyes at me now."

"I swear I am not. How can you suggest such a thing?"

"Oh, but you are! You think you aren't, but you are! Some people do it unconsciously. You see, some people have to make eyes, others have eyes ready-made."

"You really mustn't say such things with all these people about. I shall get up and go away if you go on."

"The people make it all the easier. Flirtation, like

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any form of acting, requires an audience. Given that, you may riot in innuendo, and escape scathless. 'Tis the very button on the rapier."

"Oh, stop talking like that! I suppose it's very clever, because I can't do it, but it doesn't mean anything."

"It means a lot, only it isn't every one can do it. To talk nonsense cleverly is one of the most difficult things in the world. I can do it because I'm a writer."

"Are you really? What do you write for?"

He enlarged on his contributions to the "'Varsity," mediocre performances couched in the irresponsibly humorous vein popularized by *Punch*; artificial but passable imitations of the famous A.A.M. Already he scented literary fame, and wooed it more particularly for the nimbus of distinction it gives in a lady's eyes. His accounts therefore tended to outrun his performances.

Her interest perceptibly quickened. Her face was warmly flushed. She grew more intimate, admitted liking him and a desire to see him again. "Would she meet him?" "No, she mustn't do that without her father's permission, which would certainly be withheld until he had seen Pramp."

He railed at such precautions. He could meet her by chance, a term which admitted the widest interpretation. For the present she was obdurate. It would not be right, she said. What did that matter, he wanted to know. "It's awfully stupid being good, and, besides, it does a lot of harm."

"What should you be, then, if not good?"

"Why, wise, of course. Wise enough to do what you want to. If everybody did that instead of fussing about being good the world would be a better place."



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As it is, it's the business of the wise to repair the mischief done by the good."

She relented so far as to make one concession ; he might come next Sunday to call. Her mother was away. There was only her father. She gave an obscure address in North Oxford, and they parted with a look.

Pramp scarce gave thought to her during the week. He might, he thought, run out to North Oxford on Sunday afternoon, but it was the devil of a way, and something more amusing might turn up.

Not so with Dorothy ! She returned brimful with a sense of elation at a new capture. The dourness of a father absorbed in Cicero forbade confidences. She frothed over to a school friend. *Ars est celare artem* and the chief object of an English girl's education is to enable her to conceal what she knows. An insight into the private thoughts of Pramp's imagined debutante is granted the privileged novelist from fragments of a letter despatched to Phyllis, the friend of her bosom, next day ; it savours of healthy English womanhood, rampant.

"My dearest —, I am most dreadfully, awfully, desperately sorry not to have written before. . . . I have met such a duck of a man. You'll never believe ! I've quite a pash for him—black curly hair, and I believe he is frightfully clever. I am not frightened though of him, even though he says he is a Socialist. So I have started knitting socks for him, and I am knitting him a pair all red with his college crest inset, so that he can carry his politics on his feet—Socialists do wear red, don't they ? Won't he look sweet ? Well, now I've got a surprise packet for *you*, darling. Do you remember you and me leaning out of the win-

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dow smoking opposite old Barker's preparatory school, and that fellow Ponto shying us cigarettès across the street? Did you have a pash for him? You did, didn't you? I never did exactly, though Babs thinks him irresistible. Well, anyway, papa's going to let him come to tea next Sunday, so you'd better come; only you'd better start on him at once, as I may be tempted to have a cut myself. He *can* make his eyes flash! And that would show he was really an enchanter. . . . I counted a hundred white horses this term, and then met a missionary. Wasn't it awful? I don't think I'd like to marry him. Oh, though perhaps you don't know, Mamie told me, if you can count a hundred white horses without seeing a donkey in between, the next man you are introduced to is your future husband. I met such a sweet territorial officer at Bournemouth, and I'm going to try and count another hundred white horses. He looked beautiful in khaki. I think mother had a pash for him, so I must keep off. But, of course, now I've got this new man. I expect he is coming to call, too, next Sunday. Will write again and tell you how it went off after he has been, if you don't come yourself after Ponto. Have you heard that new waltz, 'Luscious Love'? It's simply dilly. . . ."

Meanwhile Pramp, when he thought at all, was imagining a China shepherdess.

The following Sunday Pramp called. He took Jimmy with him as a support. Jimmy was the most accommodating fellow in catching the mood or attitude of his friends that he had ever met. He was a regular sponge for the absorption of other men's emotions, and, chameleon-like, was glad or sorry, amorous or puritanically chaste, according to the humour of his

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company. Intellectually, too, he was malleable. Pramp, for instance, remembered converting him to complete atheism in a night, and meeting him on the morrow crossing the quad on his way to morning chapel in a surplice. This chameleon-like faculty was given plenty of exercise by the extraordinarily heterogeneous collection of friends that it brought him. Most men like echoes to their own opinions, and Jimmy fulfilled the function of a perfect Watson for the most variegated collection of Holmes's; he thought every one admirable while in their company, and never had a hard word for any of them when out of it. Consequently, collections of people would be brought together in his rooms who would never dream of speaking to one another anywhere else.

He would give frequently the vaguest of little teas in his obscure rooms. Always the same mild cake and hot buns; the same cramped fire and mixture of electric light and daylight, with often some ragged man, the talented son of a Scotch railway porter, to keep the company disjointed. In the middle Jimmy would be handing round cake, spilling the tea on his great red hands, and deferring strenuously to every one's opinions on books and plays. His outlook on life was as nervous as his speech.

With Jimmy in tow, Pramp penetrated on the following Sunday into the outermost wilds of North Oxford. The house was small and lay in an obscure road. It was not even distinguished by the usual name "Laburnum," "Windy Gap," or what not. It was plain No. 42.

Dorothy herself opened the door—Pramp never discovered whether servants were kept—and let him into a dreary little drawing-room, betraying the

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strangest mixture of suburban floridness and donnish culture in its adornment. The Raphael Madonna faced a large copy of "A Pair of Dark Eyes," given away by the *Sketch* as a reward for fortitude to those of its readers who had persevered with the paper for a whole year. A bust of Cicero stood on the mantelpiece beneath a comic prehistoric picture of Stone Men playing golf, and a stuffed golliwog—"Isn't he sweet?" said Dorothy—half hid a view of Athens.

Dorothy introduced Margaret, her sister; Phyllis, of course, Pramp knew. The dreaded father had not yet appeared from the study, nor was there any sign of Ponto, and Dorothy confided in a cheerfully subdued voice that her mother was away. "Isn't that scrummy?" she said. Margaret, it appeared at once, was a punster, and set the note for the conversation in which everybody tried to be funny in turn. Margaret and Phyllis treated the men to a species of humorous badinage which flustered Jimmy to the point of blushing embarrassment, in which feet and hands became commodities to be stowed away somewhere, rather than integral parts of his person.

Pramp found that the only kind of remark that would do at all was the personal.

"Is she always as bad as that?" he would ask Dorothy à propos of a pun by Margaret. "How awful to live with her!"

"Nobody asked you to," Margaret would retort.

After he had come out with the phrase, "emotional tergiversation," which provoked shrieks of laughter, all his remarks were greeted with "I must look that up." Margaret's puns were Herculean. The exposed feminine bosom in the heat of an exceptional summer sun was found to grow brown: with the larger aperture of



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the ball-dress there would be, it was feared, a regrettable contrast of white and brown on the same square foot of skin. Lemon was cited as a good blancher, as good as peroxide, and Margaret came out with "lemon aids" to beauty. The explosion of this pun produced howls of delight. Their expression for all things a hair's-breadth off the beaten track was "like nothing on earth," while Owen Nares and Gerald du Maurier were the theme of emulous eulogisms. The entrance of Dorothy's father, Mr. Redford, put an end to their prattle.

Mr. Redford had been a brilliant man enough at College. He had taken scholarships and prizes in large numbers, and been accounted a credit to the College. He was, however, equally devoid of influential connexions and of that charm of manner (or the self-assurance that apes it) which is the essential substitute for influential connexions if a post as don upon a college staff is desired. He was not a hearty man, and did not possess that capacity of calling dons by their Christian names and walking arm-in-arm with them in the quad, which is the hall mark of the aspirant to a professorship. At the same time, his long acquaintance with Latin verses and Cicero's speeches had rendered him entirely incapable of any other form of employment. He had found the University to be an institution for unfitting him for life, without providing him with the income which his unfitness demanded.

He became, therefore, an unattached coach, and propelled yearly relays of very stupid men through Smalls and Pass Mods. During the first twenty years of this process, his intellect remaining unaffected, his failure to achieve success commensurate with his promise and attainments made him into a first-class



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cynic. Later, the effects of the unremitting absorption of Cicero, the Gospels and Formal Logic dulled his intelligence, and he turned to religion as a narcotic for his wounded feelings. With increasing age his mind became full of god-webs, and, making a virtue of his necessity, he started to thank God for making him what he was. This resignation was good for his happiness. Religion performs a function similar to beer, in enabling worn-out intellectual hacks to tolerate the otherwise unendurable process of teaching. He had now forgotten the thwarted ideals and aspirations of the earlier period, and may be described as having found what is commonly called happiness within. As a matter of fact, he was finding in the rewards promised by a future life a compensation for his lack of success in this one, so that when he came to contrast, as he frequently did, the merits of the life before and the life after death, he not unnaturally weighted the scales against the former.

He was rigid in his morals, intolerant of opposition, and had such a high opinion of his duty as a father that he had become, as far as Dorothy was concerned, a cross between a watchdog and an extinguisher.

Conversation dried up at his entry. Dorothy nervously poured out tea and confined her activities to glancing timidly at Pramp and not eating her bread-and-butter. Pramp did his best to start a conversation with Mr. Redford, who lamented at length the present decay in the composition of Greek Iambics, citing numerous examples from copies of verses that had recently come under his notice, and opining that Pramp, classical scholar though he was, was incapable of compositions of the kind which would have excited comment in his, Mr. Redford's, time.

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"Ah! you should have seen a set of verses I sent up for the Gaisford Prize on the 'To Be or Not to Be' speech out of Hamlet. They would have made your hair curl."

Pramp said that he supposed the art of verse-writing was becoming a lost art at Oxford. He had heard, he said, that at Latin Elegiacs especially even Cambridge was superior.

Mr. Redford looked stern, and thought that could certainly not be true. However, he descanted on the theme that things were not as they were in his day, for the next quarter of an hour. The weight of his conversation crushed out steam-roller-like any attempts to turn the subject on the part of the others, and Pramp and Jimmy were glad to get away from the sound of that pursuing condemnatory voice, not without a whispered request from Dorothy that they would come for a picnic on the river with them when her mother came back.

Pramp found that the Sunday call, with its limited opportunities for conversation, had kindled to an astonishing degree his desire to see more of the suddenly demure Dorothy. Next morning he found himself hanging about the "Corn" on the offchance of seeing her as she came to do her shopping. At twelve he met her. She got off her bicycle and walked beside him, of course expressing surprise, which he, equally of course, reciprocated, at meeting him. They walked half a mile together. Then she became aware of the existence of her reputation, feared to endanger it, and left him.

"Meet me again like this to-morrow," he pleaded.

"Oh, I couldn't make an appointment like that without my father knowing!"

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"Couldn't you? Oh yes, do. You see, he'd never find out, and if he did it's perfectly harmless, and we might easily have met by chance, you know."

"Yes, quite easily, and I expect we shall."

"Oh, I see what you mean. Be here at the same time to-morrow and we will meet by chance."

"No, certainly I can't. That would be making an appointment."

"What a timid little nuisance you are. Tell your father, if you like."

"I couldn't do that. He wouldn't hear of it."

"Well, don't tell him, and come all the same."

"Then I should be deceiving him. I couldn't bear to do that. It wouldn't be right."

"Oh, damn," said Pramp, and apologized on the spot, "call it what you like so long as you come. It is chance really, because we met by chance in the first instance. Anyhow, come." But she had left him.

Next morning at about the same time he met her again. She expressed even greater surprise at seeing him, and asked him how it was he never worked in the morning. Pramp ascribed his inability to work to the desire to see her, at which she pretended to be cross with him and with herself, and vowed that she would not meet him again.

"Then you did try to meet me this morning," said Pramp. She blushed at her slip, denied it, and next morning did not appear.

Four days in all they met in the "Corn" at the busiest time of the morning, and the last time she walked with him into the comparative quiet of Holywell. It was a very hot day, and she wore a big straw hat with red poppies in it, from beneath which her big black eyes glanced up in an entrancing manner. Her brown,

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freckled face was flushed to a warm brick colour, and the tight pink dress she wore, ill-fitting enough, and, even to a male eye, mended and darned in two or three places, suited her admirably. She seemed all pink and brown and warm, as if she had come out of a hayfield.

As they walked along Pramp offered to wheel her bicycle, and when she refused, dropped his hand on top of hers to guide it. She let it rest for a time, and when she withdrew her own did not reproach him. Pramp had received that morning a formal little note from her mother containing an invitation to him and to his friend, Mr. James, to go on the river with them the next day, excusing herself at the same time for the short notice given. Dorothy was very excited about it, and most anxious to impress on him the necessity for the best possible behaviour before her mother. Pramp promised, and in turn extracted from her an admission that she didn't know whether she wasn't a little in love with him after all. Male-like he took this as an unqualified declaration that she was, whereupon she hurriedly mounted her bicycle and left him.

The following day was wet until eleven o'clock. Pramp was a victim to the worst fears and forebodings. So violent was the dread of postponement that he could neither work, nor walk, nor talk. He sat with Jimmy gazing out on a sky that looked as if it had gone bad, so gloomy was the genius of the weather that lowered upon it. At eleven came a gleam of sunshine, and Pramp made a tour of the town to allay his growing excitement. Opposite Balliol he met Dorothy. She was indescribably incoherent at coming upon him unexpectedly like this, but at last he gathered that she was there because of a letter from her mother, which she was going to leave for him at the College. It contained regrets



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at the inclemency of the weather, coupled with a hope that Mr. Pramp and Mr. James would nevertheless be able to come to Anstey Road, where she and her daughters would do their best to amuse them for the afternoon. Dorothy confided to him that she had got her mother to write this after numerous pleadings, and said that although it would not be so much fun as the river, they would still be able to have all the afternoon together. Pramp was delighted, and promised to come early.

By half-past two the sun was shining brightly enough. The door was opened by Dorothy herself. Margaret and a fat, cold-eyed woman, void of distinction of any kind, who turned out to be Mrs. Redford, welcomed them—Margaret effusively and Mrs. Redford conventionally—in the passage. In five minutes they had started for the river prodigiously laden with cakes, buns, bread-and-butter, sandwiches, and bottles of a pale looking liquid which Mrs. Redford alleged to be home-made lemonade, and which, to Pramp's dismay, was, he learnt, to do duty for tea, Mrs. Redford descanting the while on the inconveniences of a spirit-stove and the difficulty of boiling water in the open air.

Pramp sat next to Dorothy in the punt, and to avoid losing his place arranged for Jimmy to punt practically all the time, on the ground that Jimmy was particularly attached to punting and never got tired of it. It was a dull outing at first; the conversation was peculiarly vapid, and the proximity of Mrs. Redford, who surveyed them unremittingly with a cold, unvarying expression, made any intimacies between Dorothy and Pramp impossible unless carried on in whispers, and these would clearly lead Mrs. Redford to suspect the worst at the outset.



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Jimmy was an execrable punter, and in bringing the punt in to the bank to allow of disembarkation for tea, took them through a thorn bush which removed Mrs. Redford's hat, scratched her face, spoilt her temper, and generally did not make matters any better.

The preparations for tea went forward somewhat ominously. Pramp and Dorothy unpacked the things, Margaret and Jimmy laid them out, and Mrs. Redford maintained a brooding silence.

Pramp caught the prevailing depression, which for him was intensified by the substitution of the home-made lemonade—a pallid concoction reminiscent rather of the barley water familiar to those recovering from influenza than of any known festive drink—for tea. Tea, he held, was the only thing which makes riverside picnics in any way endurable.

His irritation at the lack of tea embraced even Dorothy in its compass, and implicated her in the guilt of the barbarous provisioning for which her mother was responsible.

He did manage, however, to bring himself to squeeze and hold her hand under cover of packing up the tea-things, and in a moment of inspiration, to which Jimmy's inept exhibition of punting gave some show of reasonableness, arranged that Dorothy and himself should sit side by side in the stern of the punt, that is, behind Mrs. Redford's back, and paddle home. Dorothy supported the suggestion, saying that she was cold and wanted the exercise.

They could now talk without being heard, and for the first time were able to exchange intimacies, which were rendered all the more confidential by the necessity of speaking in the lowest tones.

Dorothy, who really believed herself to be in love,

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followed the normal course of procedure suggested to her by her novelette reading, and sentimentalized at large over Pramp's brown eyes and curly hair. She was still a little shocked by what seemed to her his flippant attitude in what was, according to her feelings, of appropriateness, a most solemn moment. He alluded to the most tremendously important things in an outrageously offhand manner. "You know, dear," he said, "when we are married I shan't allow you to teach our children any religion."

Here were three of the most sacred things in a middle class young woman's life—marriage, children and religion—taken for granted, and polished off in a sentence by Pramp, as though he were referring to the kind of marmalade he preferred for breakfast.

"What an awful thing to say. How do you know we are going to be married?"

"Oh, I suppose we shall be, and have children too. It's done, you know," said Pramp, and left it at that. Dorothy was thoughtfully silent for some time after this, and Pramp, who preferred holding her hand under cover of the rug to enduring her silence, suggested that Margaret and Jimmy should change places with them. He could now caress Dorothy's hand under the rug, which the cold justified, under the very eyes of Mrs. Redford, who took her revenge by walking all the way home with them, while Jimmy and Margaret went on ahead. She managed on the return walk quietly to disparage all the people and pursuits Pramp said he was keen on, and took full licence of the opportunities for being covertly disagreeable that the most punctilious politeness allows.

At the door of the house, which Pramp and Jimmy were not invited to enter, Pramp asked Mrs. Redford and her younger daughter to take tea with him next

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week, an invitation which lay within the confines of the strictest conventional behaviour. She replied that she would ask Mr. Redford, and let him know.

The chill induced by this dubious reply entirely failed to damp the glow of triumph experienced by Pramp at the thought that Dorothy really seemed to be attracted to him. His feeling for her he interpreted as meaning nothing more than is usually signified by a violent flirtation. He did not want to marry Dorothy, or, to put it more correctly, he had never thought of marrying her at all except in the sense in which every young man plays with the conception of every young woman he meets as a possible wife ; but he did want enormously to be able to make love to her if he wanted to, and felt just now that he could not have too much of her company. He had never experienced in the company of any other young woman quite the ecstatic thrill that her proximity produced, and he flattered himself nevertheless that his affection was remarkable for its purity. He was indeed surprised at the extent to which it lacked any physical element. Pramp was excessively pleased to find in himself the capacity for such a disinterested affection : his nature must be more spiritual than he had supposed. " Mine is a pure love," he told Jimmy, " the sort that puts women on pedestals, and ought to put men into a madhouse for nourishing such an idiotic sentiment, if we did not all combine to license the inbecilities of lovers on the glass houses principle."

" But don't you think of her sexually at all ? Don't you find yourself wondering, for instance, whether she would prove an exuberant mate on the physical plane ? "

" No more than I wonder whether she can cook, or darn stockings, which is to say, not at all. I am really

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in love, Jimmy, this time. Can't you understand that ? ”

But the warmth of his feelings was destined to receive a check for all their purity. On Monday Pramp received a letter addressed in an unknown hand, the handwriting of which exhibited all the skimpy neatness and minuteness of caligraphy that characterize the don. It read as follows—

DEAR MR. PRAMP,—

It is only to-day that I have learnt of the honour you propose to do my family. I cannot help feeling that this is a little premature, and you are, of course, much too young, both of you, to think of an engagement. If you are in earnest, however, perhaps you will come and talk the whole matter over with me next Sunday afternoon. I must ask you in the meantime not to see or communicate with my daughter in any way.

Yours sincerely,

F. REDFORD.

To say that Pramp was astonished would be to do but scant justice to his feelings. He had dallied, and it seemed he had been taken seriously. He put the question to himself and answered it honestly : had he or had he not delivered himself of anything approaching in the vaguest way to a proposal ? No, he had not. Perhaps that passing remark about not teaching their children religion ? But no, the girl could not have been such a fool as to interpret that as an offer of marriage. However, there was no denying it would be great fun being engaged to Dorothy. He would go out into the town and try and meet her. Perhaps she could throw some light on the matter.



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As he left his rooms he met Jimmy. What did he think of the letter? Jimmy was rather alarmed. "He thinks you are an eligible *parti*; probably he's been making inquiries about your income. What he's really asking you is the old question: 'Are your intentions honourable?'"

"What are your intentions towards my daughter? Do you intend to behave honourably or to act like a gentleman? Well, I haven't thought much about it, but on the whole I don't think I'll act like a gentleman. I like her too much."

Tremendously excited, he hung about the "Corn" all the morning. About half-past twelve, to his delight, he came upon Dorothy. She appeared to want to avoid him, but he made her get off her bicycle and walked beside her.

"We oughtn't to talk, you know," she said, "after what father said. We're not to see each other till next Sunday."

"Oh, I wanted to ask you about that. I had a most extraordinary letter from your father this morning, and wondered if you knew anything about it. He seems to think we are engaged, and writes to say that of course that is impossible as we are so young. I am to go and talk it all over with him next Sunday, however." Dorothy stammered out something he could not catch. "Well, this is all very amusing and fresh, isn't it?" he went on. "I mean, of course, it would be awful fun to be engaged, wouldn't it?" he added, seeing a look of something like dismay flit across her face, "but it's the first I had heard of it, that's all!"

"Well, but . . ." said Dorothy, blushing.

"What's the matter, dear? We aren't engaged as a matter of fact, are we? But I will get engaged to you



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at once if you like. Come, let's be engaged; it would be awful fun."

"Oh, Arthur! I thought—I thought you asked me something in the boat which meant . . ." She could not finish the sentence.

"Marriage? Did I, dear? I don't remember it exactly. When was it? However, I will. Will you marry me?"

"You know you said about our being married, that you wouldn't let me teach our children religion," said Dorothy, the tears beginning to flow.

"And do you mean to say you told all that to your father?"

Dorothy did not answer.

"Come, did you?"

"I told mother, and asked her what I ought to do."

"Well, you are a little goose. That, of course, is the origin of the letter. Anyhow, we'll get engaged now even if we were not before, and I will tell your father all about it on Sunday."

"No, no; we're not engaged," said Dorothy, the tears coming in earnest now. "You didn't mean it! I thought you did at the time, and now I see you didn't. You were only making fun of me."

"I did mean it. Dorothy, you will marry me, won't you?" Pramp was suddenly tremendously afraid of losing her.

"Oh, I don't know. I don't know. You've been playing with me. Let me go away."

She tried to get on her bicycle. Pramp was for detaining her, but she pushed him away, and he, afraid of a scene in the street, let her go.

And that was the last time he ever spoke to her.

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The next morning he received a further letter from Mr. Redford.

DEAR MR. PRAMP,—

It is plain from what passed between you and my daughter this morning at the meeting which, contrary to my wishes, you forced upon her, that you are not serious. In these circumstances it will, of course, be unnecessary for you to see me on Sunday. Surprising as your conduct has been, I have hitherto treated you as a gentleman in this matter, and I must ask you, if you are one, to hold no further communication with my daughter or with any other member of my family.

Yours sincerely,  
F. REDFORD.

This specimen of epistolary curtness dismayed Pramp. For the first time he realized how much he wanted Dorothy. The tendency of humans only to value their possessions when faced with the prospect of their loss has already been descanted on by writers to the point of tediousness; there is no need therefore for me to elaborate it. Pramp was filled with a sudden longing, almost Oriental in its possessiveness, to retain Dorothy at all costs.

He wrote immediately to Mr. Redford, stating that he, Mr. Redford, must be under a misapprehension as to what had passed on Monday morning: that he, Pramp, was perfectly in earnest in his sentiments towards Dorothy: that he formally asked for permission to become engaged to her, and that as the posture of affairs had in no way been altered since Mr. Redford had written his first letter, he, Pramp, proposed to call on

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him next Sunday and talk the whole matter over as originally arranged.

This letter brought the following reply—

DEAR SIR,—

I am astonished beyond measure that after your behaviour on Monday morning you should write to me again. I have hitherto treated you as a gentleman. As you decline to behave as such I must again forbid you to communicate in any way either with myself or my family. Any further letters you may send will be returned unopened, and my wife and daughter will not speak to you should they meet you in the town.

I may add that I am writing this with the full agreement of my daughter, who, you may like to know, now regards you with the greatest contempt and dislike.

Yours truly,  
F. REDFORD.

For some days Pramp hung about on the offchance of seeing Dorothy in one of the old places in the morning. Probably she purposely kept away. For a week he deliberated with a sense of growing loss on the best thing to do. The only result of these deliberations was the brilliant idea of sending to Mr. Redford the volume of Shaw's plays containing "Getting Married," with the preface on family life heavily marked and appropriately annotated. This he enclosed with a polite little note, but beyond the net loss of 4s. 6d. thereby incurred, nothing further resulted from the sally.

Twice afterwards did he see Dorothy. Once he met her during the following spring on the towpath in Torpid time. Both were with friends, and he raised his hat. She blushed violently, but made no further sign of recognition.

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One afternoon the following summer they passed quite close in punts on the Cher. This time she bowed involuntarily, and Pramp made no sign.

But then he was with Celia.

## Chapter 4 : *Tinkering with Socialism*

### § I

**I**T was in Oxford that Pramp first met the Midwivians or Mivians, but it was not until he came to London that he had leisure to observe their habits in close proximity. This famous society derived its name from the part it was destined to play in the coming of the new world. As a society of Socialists it looked and worked continually for this coming, but held that, owing to the hardness of men's hearts and the thickness of their heads, the Socialistic Utopia could not be brought to birth except through violent revolution, unless—unless the Midwivians were at hand to ease the violence of the birth pangs by gently softening the selfishness of the “haves” and curbing the covetousness of the “have nots.” By the intervention of the Midwivians revolution might be avoided, and the bad old world of to-day might be insensibly transformed into the millennium of to-morrow with no bones broken and no bloodshed. Hence their somewhat peculiar name arose from the rôle they destined for themselves as midwives at the birth of the new world ; but the full title “Midwivians,” being somewhat clumsy and liable to abuse by unscrupulous opponents, was shortened into Mivians, by which name the members of the society were usually known.



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The society had first sprung into great renown owing to the genius of a few of its early members. There had been, for instance, the constructive political thinking of Mr. Graham, the urbane wit of Mr. Hubert, the statistical greatness and encyclopædic knowledge of Mr. Sidney, and above all the literary genius of Mr. Herbert George and Mr. George Bernard. Each and all of these had acquired a great reputation. But the Mivian Society was a small society, and as the fame of its members became increasingly inflated, its bounds became too constricted to contain them. The clash of overblown reputations that followed resulted in periodical resignations or ejections from the society; but the mutual recriminations that ensued only lent additional spice to the reputations they distinguished, while the society continued on its way strengthened rather than weakened by this rejection of substances it was unable to assimilate.

At the time when Pramp first came to London from Oxford, Mr. Arnold and Mr. Herbert George had already left the fold, and, freed from statistical trammels, had finally taken the literary pen between their teeth and enhanced the already considerable splendour of their names. Thus the society had at present the rather unfortunate reputation of being a forcing-house for embryo geniuses, who immediately left it on attaining maturity.

As for the rank and file at this period, they were persons heavy with information, who dabbled discursively in state-making, knew all about drainage and birth control, and had a worthy contempt for sentiment and the social worker. On the whole, they were a dull crowd enough, fluttering mothlike round the splendour of a few great names, and re-

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flecting therefrom a spurious reputation for cleverness in suburban debating societies. The women had views on the sex question, and were invariably emancipated. Invariably also they had unrelieved fen country for breasts, spectacles and a dome for a forehead. It was a moot question whether they became Mivians because their busts were flat, or whether their busts were flat as a result of their becoming Mivians. Certainly they might have turned to the arid comfort of the society's socials and outings in despair of the love-making denied to them by their lack of charm; on the other hand, attendance at meetings and the digestion of facts and nuts for beef, might well subdue the roundest bosom, transferring its substance to the brain. The men were mainly officials, local or national, and pallid at that. Officialdom had subdued their souls: their minds were leathery without resilience. The revolutionary fire had departed from them, smothered under an avalanche of facts. They possessed neither that enthusiasm for the revolution without tears, nor that skill in social obstetrics which had animated the early members and given the society its name. The Mivian Society was, in fact, passing through a period of decadence. The performance of its great function had been too long deferred. It had outlived its inspiration; its great men were senile and its little men were worshippers at dying flames and dead altars. Most of them knew it, and the knowledge depressed them.

Pramp had first to make acquaintance with the habits of these people at the Mivian Caravanserai. Tired out and stale after his final schools at Oxford, he had taken the first opportunity of getting away from London to recuperate, and had come to the caravanserai partly because he had nothing better to do, partly

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to find out what London Mivians were like on their holidays.

The Caravanseraï was the outcome of a brilliant inspiration on the part of that eminent anti-vivisectionist, anti-carnivorous anti-tea-coffee-alcohol and smoke specialist, Trout.

"London," he said upon the Mivian Council of Authority, "is a big place : England is bigger. Consequently most Mivians never see each other at all. Even in London we meet for short hurried intervals, rush away again to our wives or our money-making, and pay the penalty of living too fast by being invariably jaded and bad-tempered." Here he glanced at Ponders, another eminent vegetarian practitioner, who, however, admitted tea and coffee. "We are really nothing like such unpleasant people as we think we are," continued Dr. Trout. "But we are always meeting under unfavourable conditions round an unappetizing table, in a stuffy little room, for the discussion of uninteresting themes like sewers and municipal trading. The vast majority of the society do not, however, know each other sufficiently well to discuss sewers and municipal trading." Sensation ! Also he said that men ought not to go away with their wives for their holidays, and that they had all got beyond pierrots and the seaside, or he hoped they had, while country inns were not what they were, or, if they were, Messrs. Chesterton and Belloc had spoilt them. This obscure reference to the evils of beer and beer poetry was allowed to pass without comment in the alluring alternative which Dr. Trout proceeded to open.

The depressing vision presented by eight hundred members of an intellectual society being continually deprived of the inestimable benefits of one another's

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company, had never before been brought home to the Council of Authority. Now that it was, it seemed an unspeakable waste. The society consisted of uncorrelated units. Bring them together, and who knew what sparks of inspiration might not be struck from the contact of their souls. The intercommunication of ideas would alone be of inestimable benefit; new truths might even emerge—amid beautiful surroundings, of course. Also the members of the Council of Authority would be able to lecture. The prospect of an intelligent audience compelled to attend lectures by the Council of Authority for one hour daily, settled the question.

A fine old mansion was hired in the lake district, and an elderly woman, a Mivian, of impregnable propriety and an unparalleled capacity for managing, named Miss Parkin, was installed as manager. Circulars were sent out. The fact that Mr. George Bernard or Mr. Sidney might be seen in the flesh, questioned, sat next to at meals, asked to pass the mustard, and photographed, worked upon the love of the great inherent in the Mivian breast and attracted the members in shoals.

It was a glorious place, Pramp thought, as he sat on the terrace the first morning after his arrival, not listening to a lecture on the "Internal Organization of the Stock Exchange" by the Finance Expert of the Council of Authority. In the foreground was a lake, glorious in the sun, on either side were mountains, at the back was a splendid pine-clad hill rising to a height of about a thousand feet, and all around were the Mivians clad in djibbahs and knickerbockers, with the Financial Expert manipulating figures in the middle.

The lecturer talked for an hour, the men listening



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with an air of rapt worldly knowledge on their countenances, the women sewing with an expression of quiet feminine understanding of the great simple truths lying behind these figures and statistics, which appeared so intricate on the surface. They were jolly women, Pramp found, and could talk about the books they had read quite intelligently.

It was at this lecture that he first became aware of Daisy. He had the works of Mr. Herbert George very much in his mind just then and so was forming the habit of becoming aware of members of the opposite sex.

She sat just behind him, a fragile girl with brown curly hair and pince-nez, and as she listened to the lecturer, taking numerous notes, she produced the effect of being very learned and a little critical. It was only afterwards that Pramp found that she had been engaged in writing a letter.

After the lecture most of the assembly went off for a fifteen-mile walk, taking their luncheons. Pramp stayed behind to play tennis, mainly because he had heard Daisy signify her intention of remaining too. Goppers was arranging the tennis. Goppers was a photographer and an ardent Theosophist; he believed in spiritualizing the flesh, and lived on nuts and raw eggs. He had watery blue eyes and spectacles, with the head of an athlete on the body of a thinker.

Philosophers have noticed that the majority of those who are possessed of some marked claim on the attention or admiration of the world, careless of such celebrity as their special talent wins for them, burn with anxiety to obtain repute for some entirely irrelevant attainment in which they approach the commonplace. Thus politicians devote their energies and conversation to golf, lawyers are proud of their



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fishing, famous logicians seek reputation for their knowledge of the vegetables of Greece, and musical comedy actresses for the domesticity of their homes.

Similarly Goppers, who possessed first-class credentials as an original thinker or crank according as one did or did not agree with him, was above all things eager to excel in tennis. Now his tennis was the most commonplace thing about him, and that is a euphemism.

Pramp, who was no great player, towered superbly above the others. It gave him great pleasure to ally himself with Daisy, who appeared on the courts after lunch and was quite the worst player he had ever seen, to cover her with magnanimity whenever she missed a shot and especially to obtain her approval of the grossest poaching on the plea of the necessity for winning, which he did. At the end she favoured him with "You play a splendid game." He glowed in the warmth of her palpable approval, but did his best to veil his conceit by belittling the others.

"Oh, I'm very much out of practice now," said he, indicating unimagined heights of excellence, "and the court here is so very different from the Oxford courts."

"Oh, were you at Oxford?" And so it all came out, including an account of Pramp's University career, of his brilliance, of his academic distinctions, of his taking a Fellowship examination in his stride, his doubt as to whether he should accept the Fellowship if offered, his literary ambitions as an alternative, and so forth. It all lasted very pleasantly till tea, for Pramp at that time possessed a marked facility for transforming any conversational opening into an Oxford gambit. Daisy was visibly impressed.

After tea, Pramp suggested a blackberrying expedi-

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tion. A half-promise to go to the nearest town, four miles away, with Goppers to buy boots claimed the lady. Pramp ridiculed the proposition. "Why are we here at all?" he said. "Because we want to get away from towns. What's the point of running back to them? You'll only see newspaper posters advertising the fact that we or the Germans have succeeded in killing so many more men!"

"Oh, I won't look at them, but I must get some more cotton, and I'm sure Mr. Goppers could never choose boots for himself."

"His feet will survive another week! You've got fifty weeks of the year to haggle with tradesmen in. Why spoil the other two?"

Daisy was acquiescent, but what of Goppers? The great man was nowhere to be seen. The rarified intuition of his psychical nature had already detected the presence of a new influence, and a hostile one. He had withdrawn the sensitive chords of his being from violation by an uncongenial presence: so he phrased it to Daisy later. In other words he was sulking in his bedroom. Daisy and Pramp went after blackberries.

### § 2

The walking party returned breathing vigour, and betraying an edge to appetite which was stayed by slow degrees with nuts, lentils, haricot beans and various savouries. Thus etherealized even by their appetites they were suitably receptive for a post-prandial paper by Goppers on "Reincarnation and the need for frugality." The paper was confused but stimulating. The room was lined with the faces of ardent young Mivians, teachers for the most part, rapt or bovine, lapping up the atmosphere of unwonted

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notoriety which the presence of Mr. George Bernard, and the expectation of taking part with him in the discussion, perhaps even of contradicting him, imparted.

Goppers began by insisting on Reincarnation as the only possible explanation of evil. It was only on the supposition that the individual had a number of lives that all the manifest injustices, the unrequited merit, the unpunished and successful iniquities of this existence could be paid and repaid in full. The misfortunes which befell us in this life could in short only be explained on the ground that we were in reality expiating sins committed in former lives, while in our successes and happiness we were reaping the rewards of good actions. To that extent at least we had not free will. Each life could only be understood with reference to the previous ones, and our actions were determined by the legacies they bequeathed. We had indeed forgotten our last lives, and therefore the events of this one seemed perplexing and unjust. To God, however, the continuity was apparent, and so was the steady advance in goodness perceptible, as our lives succeeded one another. For in spite of retrogressions there was a definite trend of progress. Thus the amœba became an ape, rationalized himself into a man, and eventually etherealized himself into a disembodied spirit.

We had each of us three planes, the physical, the mental and the astral. The physical was intermittent, depending upon our habitation of bodies. The astral and the mental were continuous. The object of our numerous lives was to pass beyond the physical and the astral planes and to live ultimately on the mental. We were all on different rungs of the ladder of progression. It was therefore our business to mortify the flesh in

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order that the emancipation from bodily dross and disembodiment into the mental might be the more expeditiously effected. More particularly meat should be eschewed, as tending to stimulate and vivify the physical side. Carnal pleasures, including even smoking, must be avoided. We must live in a world of thought and vegetables, that our release from the trammelling shackles of bodily existence, our fleshly prison, might be rapidly secured.

Thus science and religion were finally reconciled and yoked to the chariot of triumphant Theosophy. Goppers supplied the place of knowledge by converting his conjectures into dogmas. Hypothesis posed as indisputable fact, and anæmic seers carefully permeated with Theosophist theory were cited as being in possession of mystic evidence of the truth of the doctrines they proclaimed and were paid for proclaiming.

The audience was swayed. Many had already dabbled in occult science and believed they believed in Theosophy. Theosophy was at once the prop and the mirror of their opinions, thus enclosing them in a vicious circle of which they were unaware. Incredible feats of memory, intimations of former existences were cited, . . . dreams recalled. Pramp was heard to smother something about late suppers and pork pies . . . At the first lull he arose bitterly sceptical.

"He spoke," he said, "as an accredited philosopher, and as such expressed his profound conviction that Theosophy was pure nonsense.

"As symbolic evidence of this fact, it was to be observed that like most religions it was almost entirely in the hands of women. These were mainly wealthy spinsters seeking in the quasi-worship of the anæmic



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Indian Youths and Great White Masters, encouraged by this religion, a substitute for that sexual satisfaction from which they were barred by their appearance, the overplus of women, and the practise of monogamy."

Here Pramp digressed somewhat, citing as further evidence of the sexual basis of religious appeal, the preponderance of women in English churches where the spectacular and personal deity was a man, and the greater numbers and more marked enthusiasm of males on the Continent, where the Roman Catholic religion used as its figurehead for worship and pictorial appeal the person of a woman.

Recalled to his subject by the heated interjections of those who disputed his facts, or ridiculed his conclusions, and the murmurs of those who were shocked at his levity, he brought his attack to bear upon Theosophy proper. He became fragmentary, making disconnected points.

Reincarnation the core of the system! What evidence? Not a particle beyond the reported dreams of Indian fakirs whose salaries depended upon the regular and retrospective occurrence of these nocturnal phenomena, and the dyspeptic reminiscences of fashionable mediums anxious to acquire the reputation of having had an interesting past in another life. The doctrine could not be disproved certainly. But the fact that a doctrine could not be disproved was in no conceivable sense an evidence of its truth. It could not be disproved that the planet Venus was inhabited by five-eared jabberwoks who lived on purple quadratic equations. But that did not mean that there was any reason to suppose that Venus was inhabited by five-eared jabberwoks with this peculiar form of diet.



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But perhaps Reincarnation provided a possible explanation of the puzzles of existence. What single thing did it explain?

Mr. Goppers had said that the existence of evil, injustice and unhappiness was only explicable on the assumption that we were paying for mistakes committed in previous lives, and that the injustices of this world would in time be rectified in future ones.

"Leaving out of account the question of evolution and one's natural resentment at suffering now for depredations one committed as an amoeba," continued Pramp, "how does he explain the existence of evil and suffering in our first life? He must admit indeed that they did exist then, for otherwise there would be no penalties to pay or rewards to receive in our second life, which penalties and rewards in turn form the basis of the events of our future lives in an unbroken chain right up to the present. By projecting the problems and injustices of this life into a life anterior to our knowledge you do not solve them.

"Reincarnation is, I understand, a doctrine invented for the purpose of solving the problem of evil in this life. It simply puts it back into another one and leaves it there. This doctrine cribbed from the Pythagoreans has been exposed by Aristotle" (Pramp frequently made little mistakes in detail, but as he justly reflected, such allusions did not matter when you could bet your boots that none of your audience had read Aristotle), "and is now imposed upon a credulous age tired of its own religion, and like the Athenians ready to swallow whoever and whatever savours of novelty."

The parallel with the Athenians was *further* exempli-

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fied by the persons of the Theosophists themselves. Who were they ?

The Theosophists were mainly composed of well-to-do ladies with plenty of leisure, who, having just too much intelligence to be satisfied with calling on one another and tea-table gossip about their friends, turned instead in their unoccupied afternoons to Theosophy and gossip about God. They were sufficiently fashionable to desire to appear unorthodox by professing a smattering of science, but were rendered by their laziness incapable of submitting to that mental discipline which the mastery of any branch of knowledge involved. They turned from the mythology of the Church and dogmas about Christ to the visions of Mrs. Besant and dogmas about Karma. In order to attract people of this class, Theosophy had invented a regular mythology of spirit demons and Great White Masters, constructed after the fashion of the hierarchy on Olympus invented by the Greeks and the regiments of saints canonized by the Roman Catholics. All this rigmarole about astral planes and auras and attendant spirits was, in fact, precisely on a par with the anthropomorphic myths which form the necessary window-dressing of any religion. Theosophy was therefore essentially the resort of second-class minds. The Theosophist said in effect : "All these first-class philosophers and scientists are engaged in speculations and researches which it is beyond the force of my inadequate reason to follow. I am therefore at a disadvantage with them inasmuch as they appear to possess facts and to comprehend theories as to the nature of life and immortality, which I do not. But I can put myself on a level with these men by inventing an explanation of the Universe on my own account. It is true

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that I shall not be able to understand it, but then no more will anyone else—I can always say that religious truths are too high for understanding—while if I make it sufficiently pretentious and unintelligible, it will attract all sorts of people who desire the reputation of being intellectual.

“Theosophy, like all forms of mysticism, was therefore the shield of mediocre minds, a device to protect their self-respect in face of the superior intelligence of others. Like all forms of mysticism it was the refuge of the devout when their orthodoxy had been exploded. Like all kinds of religion it arose from the desire to lick the boots of some higher power.”

Hereupon Pramp sat down amid somewhat mixed noises. The crudity and violence of his utterances provoked dissent; besides, thought Daisy, it was all so barren and destructive.

She appeared, however, sufficiently impressed, if ruffled, at the rough handling of a doctrine to which she professed devoted allegiance.

“You ought to meet more Theosophists,” she said, “to find out how far from the truth most of your assertions about them are. They are mostly quite humble unassuming people who make no attempt to proselytize or to throw their religion in other people’s faces.”

“That only shows their cunning. They don’t want the reputation of fanatics, and they know that with most they would fail. You see most people are too wrapt up in money making or golf playing to pay any attention to the number of their souls and the colour of their auras.”

“But there are always some who have escaped from the religion they have been brought up in, and are open to new ideas.”

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"Not many. People's minds don't seem to run much into oddities of ideas. When they want to be odd they invent some quaint form of amusement like diabolo or roller-skating, or throw off something unexpected in the way of food like standard bread, though the latter had a fringe of something like doctrine round it."

"Well, you go and stay with Theosophists and see what they are like," said Daisy.

"Not if they are going to feed me on nuts and grass," returned Pramp.

The eloquence and malice Pramp had exhibited in his attack on Theosophy gained him a certain ascendancy in the ranks of the Mivians, who were always on the watch for promising young men. Though the interests, pretensions and, in fact, the very *raison d'être* of these good people were presumably intellectual, though Mivianism denoted the adoption of a certain political theory, a sympathy with Socialism and a knowledge of Political Economy, it was noticeable that they struck the observer more by their kindness of heart than by their soundness of head. They were not on the whole particularly clever people; their education was shoddy, and their showy acquaintance with the latest works on Eugenics, and their smattering of Syndicalism or Guild Socialism was very different from that patient marshalling of facts or acute criticism of social institutions which had made their leaders famous. But they were, especially the young women from Manchester and kindred Universities, pre-eminently good-hearted people, high spirited, enthusiastic and not particularly gifted.

Thus Pramp, who had an Oxford polish, as the Mivians phrased it, soon achieved prominence. He wrote and stage-managed a cinema play, prosecuted in



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a mock trial, delivered a lecture on the sex question and pursued Daisy.

### § 3

At the back of the caravanseraï the ground rose steeply up for nearly a thousand feet. The lower parts of the slope were covered with trees; the upper half was heather through which the climber could, if he chose, make his way to the top. He rarely took the trouble to do this, because the top, instead of being a scheduled peak the ascent of which could be commemorated as an achievement, was a flat tableland covered with heather and very boggy. Just where the trees ended and before the heather began, was a little cuplike hollow through which ran a mountain stream. Flowers grew there, the grass was soft and mossy, and a number of huge boulders scattered over the floor of the hollow countenanced the legend that the Stone men—or was it the Druids?—had once made of it a head-quarters for sacrifice and worship.

Clearly a resort of wood nymphs and fauns—at some earlier period that is—for these genial creatures had not survived the close proximity of modern Mivians. Drainage statistics have power to exorcise even the hardest faun, and the only inhabitants of the place at the moment were Pramp and Daisy, who had climbed there on a hot afternoon with intentions which, so far at least as Pramp was concerned, were not out of keeping with the spirit of the place.

Pramp had been talking for some time: the subject of his discourse, it seemed, was love. A platonic friendship, he thought, between men and women was impossible. It was a fiction based on the hypocrisies of a civilization too ashamed of its passions to avow them. Either it lapsed into coldness and mutual dislike, or it



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developed into something different, which was, to say the least of it, not platonic.

Daisy and himself were emancipated. They had the courage of their convictions and, he hoped, of their desires. They saw the wisdom of their elders as a collection of middle-class conventions based on timidity. They would not let the so-called wisdom of others stifle their own interests. Or would they? He appealed to Daisy.

Daisy supposed that it might be all right if they loved one another. But what about Miss Parkin and the others? It would never do for them to know. They were so dreadfully proper.

"Oh, Miss Parkin be damned," said Pramp. "Cantankerous old cat! Who cares what she thinks? She doesn't know anything and she can suspect what she likes. She is sure to talk about us behind our backs, anyhow."

"How very unpleasant! I hate people backbiting me when my back is turned."

"Backbiting behind your back is all right. I often do it myself. That's what backs are for. But I never backbite anyone to their face. Nor does Miss Parkin. She daren't. Let her go to the devil, anyhow."

"But she is so very outspoken; she doesn't mind what she says to one. She rather likes telling people home truths."

"I know she has a knack of telling home truths; but she doesn't bring them home."

"Not at the time perhaps; but they arrive a little later when you're not looking, and rankle."

"Rankle, rankle little truth,  
Planted in the heart of youth,"

said Pramp fatuously.

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"Oh, Arthur, don't be clever," pleaded Daisy. "How can you be on an afternoon like this?"

"I don't want to be clever. I want you. But you started arguing, dear. Why should we argue? I am always arguing. To-day I want something different. Won't you say yes?"

Daisy supposed again that it might be all right. She was also heard to mutter something about marriage. But she did not wish to prolong the conversation. She only wished that Arthur would stop talking. Certainly it was very hot this afternoon: she felt that she had been here with her lover sometime before—a long time ago—she wondered when it could have been. Something rather pleasant had happened to her. Why couldn't she remember, and why couldn't Arthur stop talking?

But the half-caught word marriage had set him off again. Pramp was a very foolish lover. He thought Daisy liked him for his brains, and that he must continually display them for her benefit.

Unfortunately for Daisy it happened that he had delivered only the night before his great lecture on the Sex Question, in the course of which he served up to the unsuspecting Mivians great slabs of undiluted George Bernard and Herbert George, culling indiscriminately from the text of certain well-known prefaces and novels, disguising the whole under a thin veil of Oxford manner, and varying it with a few epigrams from other writers. He had actually succeeded in shocking some of the more tender-minded by arguments and quotations from George Bernard, the Mivian bible, which proved, he said, his assertion that it was like every other bible in that nobody had ever taken the trouble to read it.

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Pramp was therefore inconveniently full of words just at the moment on the subject of marriage. Marriage, he asserted, had nothing to do with the matter. Marriage was simply a ceremony, of which the object was to give Oriental possession to the man and economic guarantees to the woman. It had no connexion with love, except that the artificial bonds of marriage usually killed it. If love was a disease, marriage was a sanatorium for the cure of it. Had she not read George Bernard on the subject? He had proved to demonstration in his Prefaces that marriage was a primitive survival, and family life a corrupt institution inimical to love and happiness.

Daisy should read George Bernard. He would open her eyes. One day, of course, circumstances might arise which rendered marriage necessary. Daisy would of course have a reputation to keep up, and that must be safeguarded in the event of possible contingencies. Meanwhile Daisy was too clever to marry. Only stupid women made good wives, and it was only the wide diffusion of stupidity among women that made marriage as successful as it was. Now Daisy was not a fool: and Wycherly had said that a man is a fool who marries, but a greater who does not marry a fool. Anyway, they should at least get to know one another thoroughly first. They must experiment with each other, see one another under all sorts of circumstances before embarking on such a big adventure. Meanwhile what was the use of talking? He loved her. Wouldn't she show her love for him? Nobody was likely to come here. The Mivians had gone for a long excursion, all the young ones that is, and the old ones were too fat to climb up. They were quite safe from disturbance, and in love. . . .

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Just as the indigenous faun was returning to his old haunts attracted by a low laugh which sounded to him familiar—the place, it seemed, was being given over to its old uses—he was startled by the sound of a puffing noise coming up the hill. Being a creature friendly to lovers, he uttered a warning cry which startled them just in time to enable them to meet old Dowson without an undue amount of disarray.

### § 4

Luckily the state of old Dowson's lungs was such that he had given ample notice of his arrival. He advertised the fact that he was climbing uphill by a noise midway between a wheezy bellows and a dissipated steam-engine. So consciously unconscious of anything being up was the appearance of the lovers, that anyone but a lawyer would have guessed what was up, and discreetly retired.

Mr. A. E. Dowson showed no signs of retiring. Preceded by a discreet cough, he continued to bear down upon them.

“Damn!” said Pramp.

Mr. Dowson was a barrister and an assize judge, who had collected a small fortune and a reputation for clemency, the first by getting himself briefed by the wealthy to secure sentences of several years' imprisonment upon labourers who killed their salmon or their pheasants, and the second by letting the same labourers off with several weeks for half-beating their wives to death. During the years of his practice he had developed such an interest in his own utterances that when he retired he had felt constrained to join the Mivians, thus obtaining at one stroke a good audience for himself and a place in the van of the country's



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thought. A conversion to Socialism was considered remarkable in a man of his years, and now that the days of his money making were over, could do him no harm.

His themes once varied had now crystallized into two, his sayings in the law courts where he earned his money, and his doings in Italian inns where he spent it. His genius for diverting the most varied streams of conversation into one of these two channels was amazing.

"Hullo, you children," said Mr. Dowson, "you look very happy. I hope I am not inappropriate."

Pramp thought some explanation demanded.

"Yes! We've just decided to be engaged," he said.

"Engaged! That's splendid. Now take my advice and get married quickly. I don't approve of long engagements. I remember prosecuting in a breach of promise case where the engagement had lasted ten years: defence pleaded that engagement still held; but I maintained that if a man had kept a girl dangling ten years he never meant to marry her, didn't ought to marry her, and wasn't fit to marry her—was the case too!"

"Oh, we may never get married at all. Engagements are simply devices to secure the pleasures of marriage without its responsibilities; at least, that's our view."

"Take care you don't come a cropper. I've seen too many of these irregular Mivian unions between young people who considered themselves wiser than the traditions of their ancestors and stronger than the usages of society. Luckily most of the women don't believe the stuff they talk about the immorality of marriage and all that. As a matter of fact, the little dears are all dying with anxiety to get married. That's the only explanation of how any of them do get



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married. Wants some explanation too, when you come to look at 'em ! Where are you going for your honeymoon ? ”

“ We haven't thought of that yet,” said Daisy.

“ You can't do better than do what I and my wife did. Take the boat to Calais and the train to Lausanne (don't stop in Paris by the way) ; spend a week crossing the Alps and come down into Italy for Christmas. Now when you get to Porto Fino, which you must be sure to do on Christmas Day itself, you will go to the inn there, there is only one inn, and you will ask to see the landlady, remarkably handsome woman too, but wait till you see her daughter before you think about that ! ”

“ But weren't you on your honeymoon then ? ”

“ Yes ! But I always had an eye for a fine woman. When you have had your omelette and Chianti you will go and bathe, and if you had the glorious day that I had, you can dry yourself in the sun. Think of that, on Christmas Day ! And after that, if you are wise you'll stay at the inn at Porto Fino till you have to come back ! Never have I known such food ! ”

“ Did you ? ”

“ No, my wife insisted on going on to Rome. My wife is an expert on painting. We are always having artists at our house. Some of the leading men of the day come to consult her. Just before we were married she had a rebirth in Italian art, and nothing would satisfy her but a visit to that Vatican place, or is it the Uffizi Gallery ? ”

“ That's in Florence,” said Daisy.

“ Well, never mind : she wanted to see pictures, anyway. I told her that I wouldn't leave a superb little place like Porto Fino to go to a nasty, noisy slum

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like Rome for all the daubs in the world. But she had her way—I told you we were just married.

“ ‘ Well,’ I told her, ‘ we’ll catch the midnight train to Rome and arrive at nine in the morning. We will stay there exactly eight hours until the evening train, and we will then go away.’ ”

“ And you went away ? ”

“ No, we stayed a week, and I’m not sorry now. You won’t be either.”

“ That depends on whether we have a rebirth in Italian art.”

“ It’s very curious, you know, what people will do to see pictures. Now I defended a man once . . . ” But here Pramp managed to frustrate him by appealing to a vow he had made to get to the top of the hill before dinner, a feat denied to Mr. Dowson’s scanty supply of wind.

“ What an old bore ! ” said Daisy.

“ Well, I shocked him a bit last night, I think, and now he is getting his own back. It is as much the privilege of the old to bore the young as of the young to shock the old.”

“ They take advantage of it much oftener, anyway.”

“ That’s because we are so often dependent on them for supplies, and are prepared to open our ears to their rubbish provided we may open our pockets to their cash.”

There was a lovely sunset, the view from the top was magnificent, and Pramp very much in love. Under these conditions let it be said to his credit that he felt sentimental. His sentiments we will not stop to describe : let it suffice that they were appropriate. Real feeling is not a suitable subject for literature : its expression being almost invariably commonplace. The

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man who is about to be murdered expresses himself in the clichés of the penny dreadful ; the finer frenzies of the human spirit boil over in the words of Florence Barclay. Besides the lovers, descending sooner or later to a vegetarian dinner at the Caravanserai, subdued their tongues to the principles of sane dieting and their stomachs to the assimilation of nut pie. It would be unkind to perpetuate bathos.

\* \* \* \* \*

Pramp and Daisy were now continually together. The high proportion of unmarried ladies among the Mivians was in itself sufficient guarantee that the intimacy would not pass without comment. The commotion caused among the virgin dovecots by Pramp's lecture on the sex question, in which he had openly advocated unlimited facility for experiment before the marriage tie was ever, if at all, irrevocably bound, led to a general speculation upon his intentions, and among the majority, to the surmise that they were not all they should be.

Miss Parkin in particular, with the care of Mivian damsels ever close at heart, and alive to her responsibilities as supervisor not only of the food, sanitary arrangements and accounts, but also of the morals of the party, was heard to aver that she "never did trust Mr. Pramp from the first, and did not like the way he was carrying on with that Miss Trail." The reputation of Mivian gatherings, it seemed, had been so compromised in the early days by the inconsiderateness of those who had insisted on putting the calculated Mivian contempt for convention into practice, that Miss Parkin felt herself justified in repressing with a stern hand any unconventionality which was not conventional enough to stop at theories.

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The men, however, in the main followed Oscar Wilde in thinking that discovery constituted the only sin. There were times when they gathered late at night to proclaim their manhood by a greater freedom of conversation—(it may here be noted that one of the greatest crises in the society had occurred when certain young ladies, convinced of the necessity for maintaining the equality of the sexes, had insisted on their right to be present on these occasions, and being admitted had expressed great annoyance at the failure of the conversation to come up to their expectations)—when Pramp was advised as a young man to range abroad and enjoy himself as he listed, provided appearances were maintained and married women eschewed.

The most sedate Mivians were known to exhibit a mysterious doggishness at such times. Old Dowson, for instance, was wont to expatiate on the extensive practice of secrecy on the part of polite society with regard to affairs of the heart. Every evening he would point his theory by a fresh flower of experience culled from his own practice.

“You wouldn’t think how widespread this promiscuity is, unless you had seen inside. I prosecuted a young woman once who had just produced a child and was receiving ten shillings a week from five different men at once, four of them officers, each of whom thought it was his. She, of course, assured them it was, and extorted the money as a sort of blackmail by threatening to declare the child’s parentage. As a matter of fact, she was married all the time and the child was her husband’s.”

“What did you prosecute for?”

“For obtaining money under false pretences.”

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"But I suppose each of the men had reason to entertain a fear on the subject?"

"Of course they had!"

"Well, then," rejoined Pramp, "I fail to see how the story proves the importance of this secrecy you lawyers advocate."

"Why, you can bet your boots that not one of them would have paid her a farthing had he known that the others were paying too. Each believed himself the sole violator of the shrine, and she naturally kept each in ignorance of the others. That's the advantage of secrecy to a woman."

"And to a man?"

"Oh, he must keep up appearances at all cost. Provided his peccadilloes are sicklied o'er by the pale cast of respectability, the world requires nothing more. Any hotel will take you in and ask no questions provided the lady wears a wedding ring."

Dowson's anecdote gave rise to the usual emulation among those who sought to cap it by the inevitable narration or invention of amours of their own. Pramp retired to bed wondering wherein could a difference be perceived between the atmosphere of a Mivian common-room when ladies were excluded and of a hotel commercial room, between Mivian males with all their high thinking and State moulding, and commercial travellers, business men, and journalists, boring each other with their private salacities in the smoking-room of their golf club.

### § 5

With the coming of the autumn and the war, Pramp was installed in a riverside flat near Charing Cross, and set out to lead the life of a respectable young publisher.



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He looked forward to a bumpy and eventful existence. To be sure he was living alone, and the prospect of the undisturbed contemplation of his own soul during solitary evenings in his flat did not, on the strength of the passing glimpses he had already had of that immortal commodity, inspire him with cheerfulness.

But intending as he did to live the life of a strenuous young Mivian, he would not suffer from the *ennui* of many evenings in his own company. On Monday, for instance, he would be at the rooms of the Mivian Reconstructionists, where people were leisurely engaged in inquiring into the salaries received by the classes and the masses, with a view to calculating how much everybody would get all round if salaries were pooled.

On Tuesday he would attend one of a series of lectures on "Women after the War."

Wednesday, failing any serious kind of play, dealing with the problems—preferably the sex problems—of modern life, he would relax to a music-hall. These plays, however, seemed to have lapsed since the war. Thursday he would devote to writing his Mivian Tract on "The Socialism of the Mystics with a special reference to Collectivist thought in Plotinus and Porphyry." On Friday he would visit friends. The week-ends would be taken up by Mivian walking parties into the country.

It is difficult to measure the extent to which Pramp failed to carry out this programme. In choosing the career of a publisher he had not been led by an irresistible call. It had not been a case of publishing or nothing. Rather he had drifted into it from the lack of a definite objective, looking at it as a good vantage-ground whence to jump off into an astonished and gratified world.

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As a writer on social and literary subjects Pramp was gradually to acquire a reputation. The office was to provide him with an income during the initial stages of obscurity. Undoubtedly a time would come one day when his literary fame would be sufficient to afford him a respectable income. Then he would cease to publish the books of others, and use the knowledge he had gained to over-reach the publishers who published his own.

For the time, however, the office was to be regarded as a convenient device to prevent him, as a young thinker for whom the world might not yet be ready, from starving in a garret in the usual way. It would provide him with a competency and a core to his day, but not with a career. His aspirations centred round his work in the evening. Whether it was finally as a leader of Labour under Mivian auspices or as a writer of novels he was to shine, he was not as yet sure.

Meanwhile, thanks to the office, he could afford to wait and show himself open to encouragement in either direction.

There have been worse schemes. As a plan of action for a young man it was ambitious ; but its ambition was not too great to preclude practicability. One influence alone had been left out of the reckoning : the unexpected effect of life in London.

Pramp had often wondered how anyone could read a book in London, and now he found the task entirely beyond him, while as for writing . . .

There was chatter enough about art and literature. One passed from a Mivian meeting to a concert, from a concert to the poetry bookshop. One read numberless reviews ; one was continually hearing criticisms of this or that writer ; one went to music-halls ; one accumulated a vast medley of impressions. One was

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continually being stimulated ; so continually, in fact, that to concentrate was impossible. It was impossible to sort one's impressions, for before any impression could be grasped it was wiped out by the next. Hard and sustained reading such as Pramp had known in his Oxford days seemed impossible ; but novels were read in plenty, and so were pamphlets. The Mivians he met had smatterings of every aspect of Philosophy and Political Economy. They could gossip not unintelligently about the most difficult and abstruse questions, but nobody seemed to have any definite knowledge. None were thoroughly acquainted with any branch of study. At Oxford the most obscure don was an expert in something, were it only Cretan vases or Greek enclitics. Here everybody was an amateur in everything.

And London was lonely, and loneliness, instead of stimulating Pramp to write, made writing impossible. It was not the kind of loneliness that is usually ascribed to London, the loneliness of crowds which Gissing and Mark Rutherford portray. Pramp knew stacks of people, but it was such an effort to see them. At Oxford the men one knew lived on the next staircase or at furthest a street or two away, and dropped in without invitation. In London it took one such a long time travelling to see people, that there was no time left to see them when you arrived, while people never dropped in without appointments, partly because of the increased formality of life, even more because of the risk of finding the friend out, and the length and tediousness of the bootless journey.

Pramp found that he could not bear to retire to his flat at six o'clock and settle to a solitary evening. Consequently he deliberately tried to fill the place with people, and his evenings with engagements, and serious

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endeavour on Mivian lines was thrown to the winds. The thing got on his nerves to such an extent that the most important aim in life came to be the making of arrangements to take up every available moment of the blank stretches of week-end. The most awful fate that could befall him was to be left alone in London on Sunday. Leicester Square on a Sunday morning appeared the most morbid and sinister place he had ever seen. The dust, the paper littering the streets, the unnatural silence, the unlovely appearance of the little Soho restaurants set off family life and relational Sundays as a veritable Elysium. This dread of being in the heart of London especially on a Sunday, with so many layers of houses and humans between himself and the country—his flat in the “Adelphi” might be considered to be London’s very navel—finally drove Pramp into digs on Hampstead Heath with Bright, of *The Treasury*, an Oxford acquaintance who, with cheery heartiness, did his best to reconcile Pramp to his life in town. But our hero remained disgruntled. He complained of a lack of dignity in his life.

“Just think for a moment,” he grumbled to Bright, “what our days consist of : with breakfast half-digested we step from our digs into the tube, from the tube to the office, from the office out to lunch, from lunch back to the office ; in the evening, again to the tube and so back to the digs with minds too jaded for anything beyond an evening paper and chatter about food, tobacco or sport, with bridge or billiards to finish up the evening. Do you know that for the first time in my life I have taken to reading the newspapers ? ”

“That is very serious news. May I ask why you deliberately force your mind down to the low level necessary for their consumption ? ”

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"Simply because I never have the time or leisure in London in which to read a book. I can't enjoy a book in the tube : a masterpiece should not be insulted by such degradation, and as anything is better than the uninterrupted contemplation of the faces of business men ranged in front, I interpose the newspaper."

"You're not very reasonable, Pramp ! First you complain of lack of dignity, and then you deliberately lower yours by reading newspapers."

"It is not an active choice : it's thrust on one by herd instinct. The influence of the herd is omnipresent in London. Why, for instance, does one always hurry ? There is, alas ! no explanation. One can simply record the fact. Irrespective of the urgencies of appointments or the claims of leisure, the eternal difference remains : at Oxford one lounges or one runs. In London one just hurries."

"We can't walk as slowly as we used to. You forget we are not so young as we were."

"You mean we are now the slaves of our duties and our pleasures."

"You are right, and I don't know which servitude is the more intolerable, but this is not the life we chose when we went into an office. We plumped for comfort and for security. We did not expect interest or excitement, and we certainly don't get it. But we did expect a life of leisure, and here we are spending our days chivvyng about like a couple of stockbroker's clerks, after lunching on grass at the 'Smile Nourisher.' We have sold our souls for a mess of pottage, and we have not even got the mess ; we have given up literary ambitions, fame and the privilege of being unhappy in a romantic kind of way for the certainty



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of being bored in a commonplace office, and we have gained nothing at all."

"Nonsense. I will tell you what you have gained : intellectual rest. I am in the Civil Service, and in consequence I am free from the necessity of thinking either about my work or my income. I have to do certain stated things in certain stated ways for a definite period each day. This gives me an occupation, prevents me from being introspective, and leaves my mind at rest. The office is as necessary to me as a baby is to a woman, and the reaction makes me almost intelligent in the evening."

"I am glad you are so easily satisfied. I am not. I want activity."

"Well, put on a pair of shorts and come for a run on the Heath with me before breakfast."

"I am damned if I will!" said Pramp, and went to bed in a settled gloom.

As this was perhaps the most miserable period of our hero's life, we may be forgiven for taking a glance at him during one of his most acute moments of depression, thus gaining an insight into the nature of our hero and of the civilization which produced him. The moment is a typical one. Pramp is at lunch. He is lunching at a chop-house with his friend Bright, and he is comparing the demerits of this particular establishment with those of alternative ones. The place is insufferably overheated. There is a delay of twenty minutes in bringing his steak : the waitresses are too few, overworked, and consequently ill-tempered. The air is full of a buzz of conversation, interspersed with the champing noises made by the jaws of the business men who form an impenetrable hedge around. They are talking of successful deals, of their neighbours'

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chickens, of the family holiday at Eastbourne, or of their allotments ; the while they are stolidly stoking their stomachs with ill-cooked food to pile up that energy and initiative which has made them the backbone of the nation. Their faces may be observed to glow with complacent satisfaction as they reflect upon the coming occupations of the afternoon. A will buy some carpets in China at price X, and sell them to B in New York at price Y. If Y normally exceeds X, A will be a successful business man ; if not, not. In either event A will never see the carpets in which he deals, such are the resources of modern civilization ! And now Pramp, tired of steaks, is lunching at the celebrated vegetarian restaurant, the "Smile Nourisher." Meat is here eschewed on high principle, and nuts eaten on empty pockets ; while tracts on Occultism, Vegetarianism and Theosophy, placed prominently on the tables, are intended at once to edify the mind and to divert the attention from the unappetizing nature of the fare. Even the menus are instructive, and the bill of fare is headed by such startling announcements as, "Health is a Religion," "Constipation is the Thief of Time," "Beans and Brains," and so forth. The customers are mainly anæmic clerks, the majority being women who, finding their purses too slender for a steak, are bravely endeavouring to apply on an extensive scale the proverb concerning sour grapes, and to content themselves with eggs and nuts.

This much, at least, may be said for a grass diet—it is cheaper than a flesh one, and the soupçon of soul that clings to and envelopes the "Smile Nourisher" like a mystic cloud, mingling indescribably with the smell of obsolete proteids, makes it possible to lunch there with

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perfect propriety on a shilling, without loss of caste or admission of poverty.

In addition to the respectably poor, there are those who interpret the doctrine of evolution so literally that they hold it to be immoral, if not cannibal, to take animal life. All fads are at bottom luxuries dependent upon the possession of independent means. You cannot wear sandals if you have to earn your living in an office, or make strike speeches if you have to earn it in a Government Department; and you can only believe in the sanctity of animal life if you can afford a digestion which is proof against the "Smile Nourisher." Most of the patrons of this second class, then, are well off. They are queer-looking people with long beards, raw noses, flat chests and inexpressibly clean hands with immaculate finger-nails. When they are not engaged in asking one another whether they propose to attend Mr. Wopenheimer's lecture on "Some Occult Aspects of the War," or what they think of Miss Truby's "The Astral meaning of Digestion," they are occupied in reading journals of incredible obscurity which are never to be seen outside the "Smile Nourisher," and are believed by some to be printed on the premises. Such are the *Guardians' Review*, *Straight Talks on Constipation*, and *Cheer*, the journal of the Spirit Society. The proprietor, a well-known prize fighter who has grown prosperous and rich on vegetables, though never actually visible, is always felt as a kind of atmosphere in the background. He is known to be lecturing in an hour, or to have just finished his physical drill class. One has an intimation that he is always at call, ready to come forward with helpful suggestions and advice on anything from cheese melettes to pedicure.

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Is this, then, Pramp's *milieu* ? It scarcely seems so. And as he pounds along the Strand to his publishing-house full of proteids and wind he is reminded of Gaston's quip, "You can always propagate a propaganda if you have the proper geese." And the Mivians too ? Were they geese ? No ! This would never do. Socialism was important ; he must hold fast to that at all costs !

### § 6

Christmas was spent by Pramp and Daisy at the Caravanserai. Owing to its unusual success this institution had been opened in the winter to give Mivians the opportunity of again enjoying the sweets of one another's society, this time without any leavening of the palatable mess by the introduction of lectures or study. They were to play games, go walks, debate, sing, and indulge in charades and play-readings.

The Mivians, who were attracted to this gathering attended from a mixture of motives, in which, it is to be feared, the desire for that intellectual stimulation which it was one of the chief purposes of the society to administer, formed an insignificant part. Some, imbued with the writings of George Bernard and despising their families at all times, despised in them nothing more than that tradition which, locating the seat of human affection in the stomach, sought to cement the bonds of family unity once a year by gathering together the component members for the purpose of over-eating. They had not read Dickens, and did not therefore understand that kindness and joviality are to be welcomed whatever their source, even when they are mere earthy humours springing from a basis no less solid than an accumulation of roast beef and plum pudding.

But the Mivians numbered among themselves not



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those only who were too good for family life, but those who were not good enough. Family outcasts, those whose homes had disowned them, and those who had no home to go to, found in the prevailing scorn of relations a compensation for the slights which had been imposed on them. Their families would have none of them. It was natural, then, and pleasant enough to call "sour grapes" at their families, and attend the Mivian Caravanserai.

Pramp, of course, went to meet Daisy; Daisy to meet Pramp.

Despite the fact that there were no lectures, nor indeed any attempt to instruct the assembled Mivians, the proceedings at Christmas lacked for Pramp a good deal of the light-hearted gaiety of his summer visit.

Pramp and Daisy ascended Great Gable one day, and got nearly frozen for their pains, lunching on the top. Miss Parkin had indigestion, and her government betrayed a corresponding harshness.

Even flirting with Daisy, Pramp found, had rather lost its zest as a public performance.

An atmosphere of suspicion and hostility began vaguely to make itself felt, and amorous innuendoes withered in its unfriendly blight. Driven in extremity to kissing in corridors at night, they both caught dreadful colds.

Miss Parkin and her confederates were at bottom incredibly censorious. They were ageing, and the inevitable pressure of over-ripe virginity prevented the conventional tolerance they had picked up as part of their Mivian gospel from striking any deeper than the bristles on their chins. In sex matters they loathed all broad-mindedness except its reputation, and when Pramp and Daisy, after leading unexpectedly blameless



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lives during their stay, left together on a visit to her people at Liverpool, they knew that they had implanted the seed of scandal in Mivian bosoms, and might justly fear that the growths therefrom would spread with sufficient strength and venom to drive them into matrimony itself.

It was not long before this happened. On his return to London Pramp learnt from each Mivian in turn the dreadful stories the other Mivians were spreading about Daisy and himself. As a topic of general interest it shot like a meteor across the Mivian horizon, and for the period of a month threatened to eclipse in interest the war itself. The result proved a strain for both. Having read the last book of the New Machiavelli, they were pleased to compare themselves to Remington and Isabel.

Literary familiarity with the ensuing phenomena did not, however, mitigate their unpleasantness. Scandal blows out love's lantern and leaves the wick to smoke. They found themselves stifling in an atmosphere that Mivian broad-mindedness had created.

They were married from Pramp's digs in Hampshire, to the accompaniment of jubilation and flippancy on the part of the select band that accompanied them to the Registry Office. They were still childish enough to rejoice at Pramp's appearance for the ceremony in a sweater, and the resultant dismay of the Registrar and his clerk.

Expecting so little from marriage, they were excessively surprised to find it gave them so much. It could hardly help surpassing the expectations they had formed of it; but it did this so completely that they might never have been married at all for all the difference it made.

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### § 7

The growing coolness between Pramp and the Mivians was brought to a head by the refusal of the Council of Authority to pass his application for a room at the Caravanserai the following summer. Broadbent, the secretary, told him that no rooms were vacant. The next day Perry, a pillar of the administration, who achieved the appearance of intelligence inside the Civil Service and the reality of dullness outside it, informed Pramp that he had just booked a room for himself and two friends. Pramp confronted Broadbent with this information, and was told that he, Broadbent, had been instructed by the Council to convey to Pramp, should he apply, the information that there was no room.

"But why, if there is room?" said Pramp.

"I am not at liberty to say. I can only tell you that the Council carefully considered your case before arriving at their decision."

Unable to get anything satisfactory out of Broadbent, Pramp decided to write to Miss Parkin, whose practical experience as Manager of the School gave her such influence over the Council of Authority, that it was reputed to respond to any and every recommendation whether dictated by common sense or personal antipathy that emanated from her, like the wag of a tail on a dog. Pramp felt sure that in Miss Parkin lay the source of the objection.

But committees are the best device yet invented for bearing responsibility, simply because of the impossibility of bringing it home to any member of them, and Pramp had to tread warily. As a first step, then, he wrote to Miss Parkin. Beginning with a statement that he was sensible of the disapprobation with which

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she had viewed him during the last six months, he asked in blunt terms the reason. Then with a backward glance of censure at slanders which are disseminated in secret, but fear to come into the open to risk refutation by their victim, he demanded in the light of the committee's refusal to admit him to the Caravanserai, the opportunity of appearing before the Council and defending himself against whatever accusations might be brought.

To his surprise the Council gave their consent. Whether the consent was due to the strong attachment to Democracy nourished by the Mivians, an attachment which abhors the secret decisions of the bureaucrat and will have all its doings exhibited for inspection by the popular eye, or to the pleasure anticipated by the Council at seeing a black sheep subjected to the high-minded inquisition of the pure, delivered up at his own request, as it were, for vivisection under the sacred knife of morality, is conjectural. Pramp also anticipated amusement, though of a different kind. Knowing his case to be irretrievably blackened by Miss Parkin in advance, he trusted to the activity of his tongue to procure him compensation for the loss of his reputation.

The Council was arranged round three sides of a long table, of which Miss Parkin occupied one in isolated state. Old Dowson was there and Trout, the vegetarian doctor ; the rest were all more or less personally known to Pramp. Tanner, the Quaker, had once walked about arm-in-arm with him, and Miss Harrison who wrote Mivian text-books, read some English literature and taught more, had in conversation with Pramp professed great sympathy with what the world in its narrow-mindedness called immorality.

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Pramp was motioned to a seat at the unoccupied end of the table opposite Miss Parkin.

Speaking calmly and temperately, he stated that he had been refused admittance to the Caravanserai, and considered it only just that he should be informed of the reason.

"It is a painful subject, Mr. Pramp," said Miss Parkin, "and I had hoped to avoid a discussion of it; but since you insist I must tell you that your conduct with a certain lady last time you visited the Caravanserai was, to say the least of it, indiscreet."

"In what way?"

"You must know as well as I do, Mr. Pramp, and you cannot insist that I should go into details."

"But I do insist, since I cannot conceive what you refer to."

"Well then," said Miss Parkin, not blushing but lowering her eyes with an appearance of what might retrospectively by some twenty years have been called demureness, "we have reason to believe that you carried your relations with this young lady beyond the bounds of the most liberal interpretation of the word propriety."

"You mean I indulged in sexual intercourse with her, I suppose?" said Pramp. "There is not the slightest need for you all to look shocked at hearing stated in public a circumstance which you have been communicating privately to one another, and from which communication you have individually derived the greatest satisfaction. Has a council as such a greater delicacy than the sum of all the delicacies of each of the members who compose it? I think not. So you may spare yourselves the necessity of manufacturing blushes, especially as I am going to deny the charge absolutely."



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Before doing so, however, I should like to ask whether it is not one of the chief marks of intellectual superiority which distinguishes the Caravanserai from similar holiday establishments in which young men and women are brought together—I refer to boarding-houses, church outings and teachers' conferences—that certain dogmas which we all repudiate in our debating societies as antiquated and conventional are here flouted in practice, and the fundamental right of both sexes to go separately or together to the devil in their own way is insisted upon?"

"I think, Mr. Pramp," said Doctor Trout, "that you entirely mistake the principles underlying the institution of the Caravanserai, and the object with which that institution was formed. The object of the Caravanserai is to bring together Socialists of both sexes and every school of thought, for the purposes of mutual instruction and interchange of views, and at the same time to give them a good holiday."

"It is absolute nonsense to talk as Mr. Pramp does of what is allowed at the Caravanserai," said Miss Parkin. "Besides the circumstance of what he means being wrong in itself, the effects of such conduct as his upon the young girls who come there must be considered. Many of the girls who come at present would not be allowed to come if the place got a bad name. Just let him try it on and see, that is what I say."

"It is presumably because I have tried it on that I am here now," rejoined Pramp, "though what 'it' precisely is I can't say. No man can foresee his past, and I had not the slightest idea at the time that mine would appear like this in retrospect, nor indeed have I any idea as yet what its appearance is. But, assuming my conduct to be everything you suggest, why do



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you so rigorously censure in me what you condone in others ? ”

“ I am sure there have been no other instances of this sort of thing that have come to my knowledge,” said Miss Parkin, “ or if there have in the past, the persons concerned have been refused admittance to the Caravanserai afterwards.”

“ But the Caravanserai has always been a byword for flirtations. People have been known to make love there who have never got anyone to look at them anywhere else. Schoolmistresses have got mated there by the score, and people have been known to become converted to socialism simply to obtain the privilege of going there and placing themselves upon a favourable market, a notable instance of the influence of our desires in moulding our intellectual creeds, as you at least will admit, Mr. Dowson.”

“ There have been many cases of marriages but few of impropriety, which is a very different thing,” said Mr. Dowson. “ In fact, for a considerable period, Mr. Pramp, we have had to deal with no conduct even remotely akin to yours. We felt bound to take action in your case in order to prevent the recurrence of practices of which, you must see, we could not do other than disapprove.”

“ Oh, I see ! There was a difference in my case. You felt bound to drop on me as constituting a peculiar case because I had departed from precedent by marrying the lady afterwards, a serious lapse into morality, I grant you, and possibly worthy of censure according to the views which I have sometimes heard expressed by members of this committee. ‘ Why ask for unhappiness by forming a permanent contract on a fleeting passion ? ’—Is that not yours, Dr. Trout. ‘ We cannot predict our

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feelings ten years hence ; why make arrangements on the supposition that we can ? ’—have I not heard you in one of your daringly original moods appropriate remarks of Mr. Shaw on these lines, Miss Harrison ? But surely if you really are making the mistake of living up to your opinions and censuring me for being ass enough to marry, you have brought the accusation under the wrong head.”

“ If you insist on treating the matter flippantly, Mr. Pramp, it is impossible for me to do anything further. It is a painful matter for us, as I have said before, and it was only at your earnest request that we consented to go into it again at all.”

“ I don’t see that it’s half so painful for you as it is for me,” said Pramp. “ I get my character blackened and am deprived for evermore of the inestimable delights of the Caravanserai. You find a convenient method of getting rid of people you dislike personally, which brings you an added reputation for morality, and encircles your benevolent heads with a halo for zeal in rooting out unpleasant scandals into the bargain. As for treating the matter flippantly, can you conceive a more flippant method of explaining to a man a charge against him than to keep him talking for twenty minutes without producing a shred of the evidence on which you presumably base your charge ? ”

“ The evidence was provided, sir, by your own statements ; you talked of the matter openly,” said Miss Parkin.

“ I know of no such statements.”

“ But the matter was common knowledge. Every one was talking about you and you took no steps to stop it.”

“ I take steps ! How could I when it was all done

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behind my back ? Surely it was for you to take steps. Here was the Caravanserai, according to your own account, teeming with a scandal of the gravest description ; it was common knowledge to all the young ladies whom it is your duty, so you say, to shield from the faintest breath of impropriety, and yet you took no steps at the time to put a stop to it, either by finding out whether it was true and sending me away on the spot if it was, or by convincing yourselves that it was untrue, and publicly exposing the slander. By so doing you would have removed the slur cast upon an innocent lady's reputation, not to speak of the beneficial effects of such a course upon the fictitious young débutantes of your fond imagination, who would then have remained undisturbed in their belief that the world is a parsley bed. Instead of doing these things you deliberately fostered the scandal, smacked your lips over it in private, bowed and scraped to me when you met me in public as though you cherished an enormous affection for me, and right up to the present time have taken no steps to find out whether it has any foundation in fact or not."

"Do you mean to imply that it isn't true ?" said Doctor Trout.

"What isn't ? I have yet to find out what 'it' is."

"Why, if you will have it in plain words, that you visited the lady's room at night."

"Entirely and absolutely untrue."

"But you are reported to have volunteered the information yourself to a member of the committee."

Pramp looked at Tanner, who looked deprecatingly at Pramp as if he objected to being mixed up in so shady an affair at all.

"And do you mean to say that you have brought the accusation entirely on the second-hand and unsubstan-

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tiated evidence of one person ? You have spent the whole period of our memorable acquaintanceship, Miss Parkin, in spreading a report as to my complete untrustworthiness. Yet you are apparently accepting every word of mine, passed on to you at second-hand as gospel. You really should live down to your opinions of other people's characters."

"Well, you know, Pramp, that I warned you over and over again about going too far with Miss Trail, as she was then. But you would go on."

"You warned me because I made no secret of the fact that I kissed her. The fact that you warned me against going too far does not necessarily mean that I did. The license taken by the imagination of very rigid people such as yourself seems to be in the exact proportion to the prudery of their lives. What evidence have you for more than a kiss ?"

"I can only repeat, Mr. Pramp, that we took action on your own statement."

"Which from your knowledge of my character you saw every reason to distrust and made no attempt to substantiate."

"It was not this specific case alone that influenced our decision," continued Miss Parkin ; "your general behaviour at the Caravanserai and the looseness of your attitude with regard to matters in which a certain discretion is essential do not make you a very desirable addition to a mixed company. You broke rules and encouraged others to break them, kept us all waiting up by coming in late at night, and did a number of things which, though not serious in themselves, were irritating to the people who were responsible for the management of the place. You insisted on smoking in the drawing-room, getting into the house through the ground-floor



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windows at night, and on one occasion broke one of the upstairs windows by throwing pebbles at it, in trying to persuade the lady whose bedroom it was to come out. Your language was often profane, and as I have said, your general attitude to the young girls and even the servants of the Caravanserai was often most offensive. You were trying continually to throw ridicule on institutions like marriage and religion, and seemed to find decency in women as odious as hypocrisy."

"Perhaps, Miss Parkin, that is because decency is their greatest hypocrisy."

Mr. Dowson, during the previous dialogue, had restrained himself with great difficulty. He looked furiously angry and had tried several times to break in. You could hear his mind working with indignation like a cow chewing grass.

"If you think, Mr. Pramp," he said, "that remarks of that kind are going to help your case, you make a great mistake. It is impossible for us at present to reconsider our decision, and Miss Parkin has already given you what are, to my mind, very adequate reasons for it." ("Hear hear!" from the committee.) "If you show by your conduct in the society during the coming year that you desire to be readmitted to the Caravanserai next summer, we may be prepared to reconsider the question then."

"That will be mighty good of you. Thank you for your condescension in advance," said Pramp, "but I'll be damned if I ever visit your beastly boarding-school again!"

He left them in dudgeon, and the society knew him no more. But to cease to be a Mivian had ceased to be a cause for regret for the society, divided over the war, lost influence and caste.



## TINKERING WITH SOCIALISM

All that was vivid and vital left it and sought an outlet elsewhere. It became like the Church, a husk without a kernel, a mausoleum of dead reputations.

Even when the approach of Conscription rent the air with controversy the united voice of the Mivians was heard uplifted neither on the one side nor on the other. And when the fateful day itself arrived, when Radicals abjured their watchwords and forgot even to talk about the liberty of the individual, when the Church deleted the sixth Commandment and expurgated the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, when the Nonconformists held up their hands in horror—but made no other use of them—at the persecution of the conscientious, when the *Daily News* almost took a definite line, and the Army was supreme in the land—on that day the Mivians were just not heard of at all.

## Chapter 5 : *Real Sentiment !*

### § 1

**I**T is a queer fact that no one has noticed the New Forest. We prate of the beauties of Cornwall ; we sometimes visit Devonshire. The Cotswolds are known to every Oxford undergraduate, and form the subject of his earlier poems. The motor-car has called our attention to Surrey, and the Metropolitan has discovered the existence of Beechy Bucks. It has been generally believed that Sussex is the exclusive property of Mr. Hilaire Belloc, but that has not prevented us from visiting it and discovering that it is still beautiful despite its literary ownership. We have been to the Isle of Wight in sufficient numbers to remove the impression that it is a garden, while every one who has read Baddeley has been to the Lakes, and even some of those who have only read Wordsworth. Even the Continent has not escaped the more adventurous. Royalty's visits to Paris created a scandal and produced the Entente Cordiale, since when Paris has become popular.

Except, however, for a very dull book entitled *The Children of the New Forest*, written early in the last century and full of bandits and religion, nobody seems to have noticed the place. The widest stretches of an imagination which motor-cars have stimulated to destroy distance cannot call it suburban, while the call of Bournemouth, the Paradise of the City man, with its " nice " people and winter gardens, on the further side, is too insistent to allow us to dally in the Forest.

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This regrettable state of affairs continued until a certain Mr. Caine procured a wife and a donkey cart, drove them through the Forest early one spring, and proceeded to write a book describing his adventures.

During the course of his tour Mr. Caine discovered a boarding-cottage at Brook, containing a Miss Ellen and a Miss Jessie ; in the course of his book he immortalized them.

Thus it happened that Pramp during his last year at Oxford, being in need of a quiet place and good cooking in order that the final spurt of reading before Greats should be as little unpleasant as possible, read Mr. Caine's book and in consequence went, in the company of five other men, to the boarding-cottage at Brook.

Here he had been happy ; here he had known romance ; here for the last time he had been really different from other men ; here for the last time the flowing river of idealism had flowed clear and bright ; that river so soon to trickle away into the reedy sands of acquiescence, when Pramp on £300 a year would subside into a villa, to till his allotment and quarrel with his wife. Pramp then, and we hope it will not make the reader annoyed with him, was sentimental about Brook ; and after being expelled by the Mivians he wished to introduce Daisy to this place where he had been happy. Having married her, it seems only right and fitting that he should take her away from the facile cleverness of the Mivians to the simple life of Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie with their talk of dogs, brocades and puddings as a relief from the chatter about poor laws, servile states and statistics. He hoped with his love to recapture youth and revive the ashes of undergraduate sentimentality.

The unexpected happiness of connubiality, the oddness of finding legality, respectability and convention

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allied for once with pleasure, and pointing unhesitatingly along the same road, the joy of meeting Miss Ellen at the station decked out in a brand new scarf in honour of the occasion, and of driving six miles through the woods to Brook on a glorious autumn day, in the identical donkey cart used by the historic Mr. Caine and his wife—all these things filled Pramp with such happiness that by the time he arrived at Brook, Mivians and the war had passed alike into the limbo of bad dreams which are forgotten in the morning.

After a considerable luncheon Pramp thought to banish the last relics of Mivianism by calling on the rector, an old friend. Daisy stayed behind. Parsons always provoked her to hostility ; she was not yet sufficiently emancipated from religion to be amused by it.

He was a jolly old man, rectoral, fond of cricket, his garden and the parish children. He still read his classics, which he carried about with him in pocket editions on journeys, his preference being for Lucretius and Thucydides, writers admirably adapted to encourage the natural human pagan to peep through the veneer of parson.

Perhaps in peace time or at Oxford Pramp would not have been interested in him ; but in certain moods he felt that he would, even in those days. But now all his prattle of his garden and the young beetroots that he was going to try with Sunday's cold meat, of the new Belgian method of planting celery and seakale, and then his narration of the summer glories of his garden and his wife's improvements—of these in a somewhat censorious and disparaging tone—and the very sight of the lingering flowers in his beds, a withered stalk of hollyhock gemmed with a few shrivelling blooms, a late rose, the red stone-crop in the borders, and the choir of gnats

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droning up and down in a golden, dusty dance above the holly hedge—all this seen in direct contrast to tubes and buses, business letters and over-driven waitresses, pointed intensely for Pramp the contrast between the new life and the old.

*Reader.* What is all this talk about Pramp's feelings? So far you have been merciful and spared us Psychology. But all this stuff about beetroots, seen in contrast to tubes, really, really. . . .

*Author.* They are almost the first creditable feelings he has had. Don't be hard on them. Besides, I am just going to explain why they are brought in.

Much of Pramp's future conduct may be attributed in part to the most trifling circumstances of this particular afternoon. It is one of the ends of life to make all our actions matter, to make everything significant, and this afternoon everything did matter.

*Reader.* This is worse than ever. If the choice is between these aphorisms about the ends of life and Pramp's feelings, for goodness' sake let me have some more feelings.

*Author.* You are just going to.

He was led up to wash before tea into a spare room whither he had never before penetrated, full of half-forgotten things, old photographs of children, pictures that had once been in the nursery, and a venerable rocking-horse, into the entrails of which two generations of children had stuffed through a hole once occupied by the tail undesired crusts, and other rejected odds and ends of food, with disastrous osmic effects. Miniatures of grand relations—they had good miniatures there—lay on a brocaded settle at the end of the bed. On a shelf was a collection of prayer-books and bibles, mile-stones these in the children's religious life which you



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might set up in their chronological order of reception, from indications afforded by their general bulk, size of print, and austerity of fly-leaf dedication.

But among all these things that spoke of children indeed, but of children vanished and grown up, there lay on the brocaded settle, side by side with the miniatures, a heap of other childish possessions, as full of present youthful life as the others were of dying memories—on top of all a white silk dancing frock, “honey-combed” on the breast and wrists, and a pair of dancing slippers that a child of seven or eight might have worn.

*Reader.* This is really too bad. You are only writing this sentimental stuff to show that you can do it when you really try. I believe you, but as you do it rather badly, why go on trying?

*Author.* Be quiet. This is my sentimental chapter. If you don’t like it, go on to the next. Meanwhile don’t interrupt.

Pramp took up the left slipper—she had danced in it perhaps already once or twice—it was as light as a feather and fastened with elastic round the ankle and over the instep, like the ones that Whistler’s grey and green girl wore in the speckled picture. It was in such slippers as these that *she* would have stood to the artist, hanging her summer hat in her hand and pouting at the free butterflies above her head, if he and she had lived today. The one before him differed little from hers, save for the higher, gracefully-curving heel, and perhaps a slenderer toe, for she was dressed with modern daintiness, this little “danseuse” whom he had never seen and about whom he wondered if she really lived.

Why were her things lying out like this on the old settle? Might the door open soon and she run in herself, glad to put them on again and dance, or the nurse,

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that living embodiment of authority, enter and gravely lay them in the wardrobe that stood in the corner there? He remembered though that there were no children in the house, and there was no party surely that night. And so it was quick, shifting dreams of his own that he fitted to them, dreams of dancing lessons in the big drawing-room where all the parish children came, or better still of Christmas or birthday parties, when the carriages rolled up the drive in the foggy, early hours of December evenings. He saw the childish foot peep from the dark old cab, feel its way out of the rugs, and poise itself to take her weight as she touched the step; or perhaps she walked to the party, her shoes in her bag, or in an elder brother's deep pockets, not to be put on till her strong boots were off and herself dry and warm in the house.

But in the end it was with a dream peculiarly personal that he left the room and went again downstairs, a dream of a birthday party, with her as the guest in the autumn he loved so well. Tea on the lawn under a mellow south wall, the cake wreathed in reddening creepers, hide-and-seek in the darkening corners of the garden, where her feet sent the gravel flying and her white dress betrayed her under the laurel hedge; and last, the farewells waved from the porch, her face flushed as she spoke good-bye, flushed with excitement and the western radiance; the drive back in the governess cart, her mother welcoming her at the gate, saying that she must really go to bed at once, and brushing from her hair a few dead laurel leaves.

### § 2

A few days later they were joined by Strachan. Strachan had been a close friend of Pramp's at Oxford.

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Their friendship was intensified to a large extent by that sentimentalism which the atmosphere of Oxford seems peculiarly to engender, and which so often arises, as one of the Greek epigrammatists notes, between young men who embark together on the study of Philosophy.

Strachan was subject to sick headaches, and had spent some fifty pounds on oculists who unanimously attributed these to his eyes, and insisted on his wearing on certain occasions no less than three pairs of spectacles at once, until a rising young doctor operated on him for appendicitis on the ground that the root of the trouble was stomachic. The only result of this was slightly to intensify the headaches owing to the confinement and lack of exercise necessitated by a long convalescence, and Strachan began to regard his headaches as incurable until, to his surprise, he found them beginning to diminish as a result of a total cessation of work which occurred during a fit of despondency. It then appeared that if he wanted to forego headaches he must in a large measure forego work as well, and as he was an ambitious young man with an overpowering desire to get a First in schools, the Third which he eventually obtained had a prematurely souring effect upon a temperament which was otherwise agreeable enough.

Two avenues of employment are open to young men with a classical education and nothing particular in the way of money or influence who secure Thirds at Oxford,—the Church and the School. A Third qualifies one either to give instruction to adults about God or to children about Greek Grammar, the salary being commensurate in a reverse degree with the importance of the duties undertaken. As Philosophy had had its usual effect of making Strachan into an agnostic, he arrived by the process of elimination at schoolmastering,

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and now found himself holding the post of a lower-form Classical master at a salary of £150 a year in a third-rate public school.

A year's experience of this work had brought him largely into agreement with Shaw's doctrine that "he who can does, he who cannot teaches," "doing" for him being more or less equivalent to writing. He was burning with literary ardour, but cursed with a want of energy that made his output fall lamentably short of his aspiration.

His attitude at Brook was accordingly one of violent discontent with the present, mixed with sentimental reminiscences of the golden past.

He had had a particularly trying time at school for a would-be literary artist, correcting immature essays by fifteen-year-old boys on the position of the stage in the Greek Theatre, the Causes of the Peloponnesian war, the character of Tiberius and other threadbare subjects, with regard to which it would be difficult to say whether teachers or pupils were more indifferent. Most irritating of all was the routine of school life with its strict confinement of the intelligence to channels so well worn that its exercise became almost mechanical, inimical alike to creative and critical work.

It is doubtful whether the creative spring ever bubbled strongly within him, but the flying scud of Greek Grammar papers, Latin Elegiacs and speeches to be turned into *oratio obliqua* seemed quite effectually to have choked whatever powers he once possessed.

"I feel flat, expressionless, tongue-tied," he said to Pramp. "There is not an idea in my brain, I fancy, lively enough to wriggle down my pen into expression. I seem for weeks and weeks and weeks to have been thinking nothing. If an idea strikes me I am never

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able to develop it, and afterwards I cannot recapture the train of thought from which it flashed. Yet I am so dipped in essayist literature that I try to turn everything to literary account. You remember Samuel Butler's description of the mature Ernest in the *Way of All Flesh*? Ernest always carried a note-book in which to jot down tags of thought and scraps of observations, which might form the nucleus of essays. I too spend most of my time in the painful analysis of people who catch my attention, just as when I am out walking I wrestle with the landscape, trying to fit words to it. I often think I am a fool for my pains, labouring to be an artist; and yet from time to time a little encouragement comes."

"Surely," said Pramp, "you had encouragement enough over your John Angel sketch? Everybody at Oxford was extraordinarily struck with it, only you were a fool to write it on a theme which made it unprintable by some 240 years. It would have gone down very well as a play by Wycherley, for a Restoration audience, but for practical use to-day it was a sterile *tour de force*."

"Yes, that sketch *was* good. But I couldn't do it now. My style even has gone, and I know the reason—essay after essay, week after week, to be corrected and scratched into grammar, not style!"

"Can't you persuade your father to let you give up teaching, and afford you a bare competence to live on for the next two or three years?"

"My father! You know it is from him ironically enough that I inherit my spark of restlessness, my seemingly paralyzed mental tentacles. He, of course, is worldly wise after the manner of fathers all the world over, who give their sons good advice, not being able any longer to give them bad examples. He bids me work and



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save, i.e. teach and save ; 'Work your way in,' he writes, and again 'You can't make your living by literature all at once.' It is all meant for my good, of course, yet every word he says increases my determination to fling off the threads of teaching, which Time, King of the Lilliput minutes, binds faster and faster till Gulliver is inextricable (you laugh—I sneer myself at my own swelling images, my bombast !), and at last cuts himself free only to go into the world a naked man, to make its acquaintance and struggle with it in hatred, irony, humour, in any mood from ink to champagne.

"But you must be bored with my literary whinings. I meant to sit and gossip cheerfully with you till the early hours in the Oxford way. And yet it's difficult for me to recapture the old atmosphere. We seem somehow to have drifted so far away these last years, ever since I started teaching. The gap one leaves at Oxford by one's departure, which one flatters oneself at the time will be so tremendous, fills very quickly, I know."

"Yes, I admit," said Pramp, "that I had every temptation to forget you the following term, what with the Union, being Editor of the '*Varsity*, Schools and so on ; but there were letters, and yours were always unique."

"Yes, but yours meant more to me than mine to you. The gentle, half-curious kindliness, the sudden touches of personality that grow evasive when friends are parted and are recalled by a familiar phrasing or even a mere statement in a letter, just as you remember a curl or a gesture from a photograph—all these were brought back by your letters, which I used to read and re-read simply for the pleasure of the moods they brought."

"Ah, there you have your subject ! Every phase of the mood of the brooder over old letters demands an

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essay in the mixed Lamb Stevenson style. There is a chance for your literary gift if, indeed, you have one."

"I'll try it some day, given the energy," said Strachan. "But I used to venture these things with considerably more address two or three years ago. You remember our first term at Oxford you thought me something of a light in the literary world?"

"It's awfully dim to me now how and when we first met. There was such a rush of fresh acquaintances that first term, and it was only later that certain figures—yourself, for instance—began to disentangle themselves from the general ruck."

"Oh, I remember lots of it; this was the very first time of our meeting. (Scene: scholars' table at dinner.) *J. H. Strachan.* 'Were you the man who played scrum half to me this afternoon?'

"*A. R. Pramp.* 'No!' and a long silence in which, I think, I liked your face. That was all we said to each other that first time. I'm not sure that I asked you to my rooms after Hall that night. Then a little later one night you did come in, and prowled about my books, and we sat in front of a roaring fire—I could smoke a pipe without qualms by then and there was always a 4-oz. tin of 'King's Weed' on my mantelpiece (you must remember the first time you were persuaded and were sick)—and I read you Old China and you were entranced, and Rabbi-ben-Ezra, and you were filled with a passion to explore Browning. And then you espied an official envelope addressed to J. H. Strachan, B.A., and you laughed and said: 'Some one's playing a joke on you,' and then I laughed, explaining about my Colonial degree, and you were silent, thinking me very, very clever; and you read an essay of mine written when I was hesitating between taking Honour Mods and Greats, or

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Greats alone, and said, 'I say, you can write English!' and I was pleased and proud.

"And we took in the *Oxford Charivari* every week, and really thought it all good except the drawings. I started buying it, I think; but once you came to my aid with a penny, and thenceforward it was in common, our first common property. And you encouraged me to write the criticism of the 'Girl in the Train' which we saw together for it, and the cheque for a guinea came and I took it up to your room and you were out, and I had to tell you on the way to 'Hall'; and we both thought somehow that my future was made in literature; and we also thought the guinea was not to be hoarded, so we went out to spend it, and the old rogue in the High tried to swindle us in vain over the Hogarths, which you bought eventually in the Broad. And when I wasn't 'blooding' it with the second-year men at Cuthbert Montague's lunches, your scout—what was his name?—Golders, used to bring your lunch down into my rooms; and in the evening we used to have cocoa with Bates, who liked Calverley; and you and I entertained him and Thomas and Mint in my room one evening, and Mint talked far too much about his relations in Canada—although you'd hardly have said so without me, for you didn't dare to form definite opinions of people in those days—and the lingering public school spirit in me thought it was a good thing you rowed in the Morrison fours. Then in the 'vac.' we each found that the other was an appropriate person to write to, and I came to London because of my eyes and we both came up to Oxford by the 1.45 from Paddington and drove together to the side lodge, and you thought half-a-crown was enough for the cab, and I wanted to give three shillings. And you had brought all Hogarth back

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with you, a complete set of prints (it *was* that term, I think); I tried to show you that you were wasting your time writing verses, and you chewed your pencil to shreds and 'weren't at all sure.'

"Wasn't it before that—I don't know, though—that we went to 'Peter Pan' and the 'Blue Bird' together, when that blessed foreigner tried to squeeze into the front of the queue, when the Haymarket doors were opened, and was gently pulled out by a bobby?

"Then summer, and those jolly library editions of Meredith we read in a punt—you and I, you and I—Good God, I didn't think I remembered it all like that."

"It all comes back to me too, as Slightly says. Once set a spark to the train of memory and reminiscences explode all over you. Now I understand how it is autobiographical novels get written. But you never came to France with us, did you? I forget why."

"No! And in the autumn you had moved your rooms and were not so convenient for tea; but before I went to the sanatorium for my eyes I gave you 'Virginibus Puerisque,' and put my first Oxford light verse therein on the title-page; I was pleased about that for it was the first thing I wrote for you that I thought good enough for you to see; my 'Agnostic's Feelings in Balliol College Chapel' had been burnt at once unseen."

"Well, I think it is time to turn in," said Pramp.

"Not quite, for my gossip is not yet done; we've reached the point when in chairs drawn up to the fire we may gradually fall into silence, a little sleepy eyed, and sit gazing into the coals, talking perhaps in drowsy snatches like children, musing and dreaming, but, please God, not thinking."

### § 3

For a week Strachan stayed in the New Forest. He



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talked perpetually of writing, but produced only one essay in the Hazlitt vein on "The Two Walkers," contrasting Pramp, the vigorous man, who was forever wishing to open up new country and pound through the old at four miles an hour to get to it, with himself, who would dally in the well-known spots and not go farther afield than the next village, knowing his surroundings so well, however, as to name every glade in the wood.

The rejection of the essay by the *Saturday Westminster* so discouraged Strachan that, despite Pramp's solicitude for his welfare, shown by administering to him extracts from a small book by Andrew Dennett entitled "How to do the Publisher," the burden of which was "Never be disappointed at the return of a manuscript. The taste of editors is capricious and bad. To try again costs nothing but another stamp," that he could not bring himself to pen anything else while in the Forest, or to send "The Two Walkers" elsewhere.

In proportion, however, as his prospects in literature darkened, his disgust with schoolmastering increased. On leaving Brook, he threw up his job and applied for a commission, having no enthusiasm for the war, but finding in it, as did so many others, a refuge from the contemplation of himself as a failure in life and the vision of unattainable literary celebrity.

Within a month a bullet through his brain put an end to a literary career which had begun un auspiciously, and probably would have ended in the river.

Meanwhile, Pramp continued to enjoy the New Forest. He was admirably adapted to life, in that his feelings were never so troubled by the loss even of a friend but that he could see God's hand working for good in all that happened, and could thus congratulate himself on his perspicacious piety in the best Joblike manner.



## Chapter 6 : *The Family and the Club*

### § I

“ **I**T is not to be thought of,” said Mrs. Pramp.

“ What isn’t ? ” said her husband.

“ Why, the idea of Arthur’s joining this club of his. A lot of professional cranks and agitators, that’s what they are ! I can’t think what put such an idea into his head.”

“ Well, my dear,” said Mr. Pramp, secretly hoping that his wife was not going to start one of her interminable rows with Arthur, in which he would be bound to take part—on her side, of course—for fear of another row with himself, “ I trust he won’t do any such thing. He’s of age now and ought to be able to judge for himself within limits ; but I can’t believe that he would go and behave so badly now after all the money I’ve spent on his education.”

Mr. Pramp held strongly that the object of education was to teach the young to think like himself, the measure of agreement achieved being in direct proportion to the scale of the financial outlay. If, therefore, Arthur, who had really had a very expensive education, entertained opinions which his father regarded with all the horror of which his phlegmatic temperament was capable, it must be due to some incurable perversity on the part of Arthur.

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It should be mentioned that this attitude of Mr. Pramp towards his son was modelled directly upon his attitude towards his Creator, to which indeed it owed its origin. In common with most other self-respecting Englishmen, Mr. Pramp regarded religion as a sort of business speculation in spiritual commodities, whereby in return for regular attendance at church, abstention from the grosser forms of vice, and judicious offerings to the more deserving charities on his part, God was bound by an implicit contract to lend him countenance and support in all transactions upon which he himself, or the nation of which he formed a humble but not unworthy unit, was engaged.

God was a person of reliable patriotic sympathies, who was bound to take the same view of the rights and wrongs of the great national struggle as Mr. Pramp, and it was only to be expected that views that were good enough for God should be good enough for Arthur.

Arthur, however, had behaved very queerly over this war business. He didn't seem keen on it, somehow; too critical by half! And Mr. Pramp could not help feeling secretly glad that a hitherto undetected heart weakness had caused the doctors to reject him for military service. Otherwise, thought Mr. Pramp, he might have developed opinions, always a nuisance at any time, and particularly awkward just now. It wouldn't do to start thinking about the war. And so Mr. Pramp, always a kindly and genial old soul, who cared, as a rule, far too much about domestic peace and his food to have either the energy to oppose or the understanding to sympathize with his son, forbore to ask questions about the latter's opinions, hoping only that he wouldn't do anything to annoy his mother.

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The dread of annoying Ida had become second nature with Augustus Pramp. His opinions, his habits, even his appearance were modelled almost entirely on the paramount necessity of keeping Ida in a good temper. It would indeed have been difficult to say that the views which we have just attributed to him about education and the Deity were really held by him and not those which he thought Ida would like him to hold. It seemed, indeed, impossible to exaggerate the extent to which he deferred to his wife. That it could be exaggerated, that the old boy could still break out, cut the leading strings that had bound him for years and incidentally deliver himself with force, originality and conviction, the upshot of this club business was to show. Meanwhile, however, Mr. Pramp only hoped that Arthur would not annoy his mother. He remembered that Ida always made it so decidedly uncomfortable for every one when she was annoyed, and distributed her disfavours with a malicious impartiality under which the innocent suffered with the guilty. And she clearly *was* annoyed over this club project of Arthur's. She had always disapproved of his friends, when he had been imprudent enough to let her meet them, proclaiming that they were not ladies and gentlemen; or, what was worse, discovering that they had been born such, but had somehow lost that sense of decency, that feeling for the fitness of things that alone enabled one to keep up the necessary pretences. That Arthur should join a club composed of these people—young men with long hair and young women with short hair, she had heard them called—was regarded by her as a definite challenge to all that his mother's influence stood for. She was not selfish enough to stand in Arthur's way when he

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wanted what was for his own good, but when it came to letting her down like that, it wanted all a mother's love to protect him against himself.

"I am sure, Arthur dear," she said, "that you wouldn't be so selfish as to grieve your mother, who loves you, and only wants what is for your own good. As if, with my experience of the world, I don't know what consorting with this kind of person leads to."

"What kind of person?" said Arthur innocently.

"You know as well as I do the kind of person I mean. I hate these people with new-fangled ideas, who think they know so much more than their parents did. All these Socialists, you know, are out 'on the make.' They have all got an axe to grind, and they take up with these notions because they think they can get something by them. And the women, from what I've seen of them, are certainly not ladies."

"Well, nobody wants *you* to have anything to do with them if you don't like them," grumbled Pramp, "but I think I ought to be allowed to choose my own friends."

"I should be the last person to interfere with your choosing your friends," retorted Mrs. Pramp, "if only you would be content to know normal people and choose suitable friends from among them. As if there weren't enough nice young people that we know, that he must go out of his way to hobnob with every Tom, Dick and Harry out of the gutter," she went on, addressing her husband and relegating Pramp, despite his presence, to the third person in her indignation.

"Well, my dear, now he knows you feel so strongly about it, I hope he won't pursue this project of joining the Ephemeral Club. We know it's a bit lonely for him living in London by himself"—both the Pramps



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had been kept in ignorance of Arthur's marriage with one of the cranky people, and pictured him celibate and lonely in his London flat—"but if he'd only take up some of the introductions we've given him, he'd find plenty of the right sort of people soon enough."

It was a standing grievance that Pramp, who had gone to London with a sheaf of introductions to the families of lawyers, clergymen and old University friends of his father's, had studiously avoided them, thereby causing heartbreakings at home and forfeiting a by no means despicable chance of a legacy from an aged and celibate priest.

But Mrs. Pramp was essentially too tragic a person to admit of any solution that was not clear cut, or that had about it the air of a compromise. Pramp would either consort with the people she approved of, or the family would know him no more. It was intimated more particularly that his presence at the Christmas festival, which the Pramp household were to celebrate during the week, would in that event be superfluous.

Pramp had the usual dislike of interference by his parents, but he found the allowance that his father made him a useful addition to the pittance which was deemed a sufficient reward for an embryo publisher, and, besides, the cook's Christmas dinner and the drinks attendant thereon were things not to be missed. So he did not attempt further argument with his mother at the moment, secretly determining to join the club and say no more about it.

Mrs. Pramp was undeniably a tragic woman. She passed her life metaphorically at the end of a diving-board, ready at the slightest provocation to go in at the deep end. It was her misfortune that nothing ever happened in her life to justify any step even bordering



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on the extreme. She plunged therefore into shallows, and lived a life of anticlimax. Strangers laughed up their sleeves. Her family, who were used to her, made an art of artifice in playing up to her moods, and gave her always the answers she expected. Her acquaintance with truth, therefore, was of a nodding description. Never having to face the actual, she unconsciously shut her eyes to whatever would have displeased her had they remained open. She did not so much bow to the inevitable as cut it dead. Knowing that Pramp would join the hated club when he returned to town, she would not admit even to herself that she had the knowledge.

### § 2

Undoubtedly the Pramps had a first-rate home. Mr. Pramp, who was a retired Indian Civil Servant, had somehow escaped the Southsea boarding-house to which it is usually left to complete the ruin of the liver that India has begun, and had taken up his abode in a converted farmhouse at Patching, in Surrey. It was not exactly the best part of Surrey. The best part of Surrey, as every one knows, has been cornered. Before the coming of the motor-car and the financier's country house, Surrey was perhaps as beautiful as any county in England. The wooded hills, the heaths, streams and meadows, the sudden contrasts of scenery, the infinite variety of view, were all on so small a scale that every type of English scenery, represented as it were in miniature, could be viewed in the course of a day's walk. In a mile one could pass from the rich pasture and river scenery of midland England to barren, pine-clad hills that seemed to have stepped straight out of some Scotch landscape, and which in their turn give

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place to rolling grassy downs which you would think to find in Sussex.

London, of course, and the spread of the southern suburbs effaced, after a time, all Surrey north of Sutton. But the further parts were left inviolate for many years by the unparagoned brutality of the railway services.

Then came the motor-cars and in their wake the motoring hotels and golf courses. The big estates were taken over by rich city merchants and Americans, who curtailed rights of way and closed footpaths, for the passion of the newly made rich man to exhibit his possessions to admiring friends is only equalled by his fear that they should be overlooked by the excluded.

Surrey has rapidly become a rich man's county. There were said to be thirteen millionaires within ten square miles of Dorking, and the natives were being transformed into a race of hotel keepers, butlers, chauffeurs and shopmen. Two hundred motor-cars could be counted in an hour on the high road from London to Portsmouth on a fine Sunday. The "Box Hill Hotel" on God's Day was almost enough to provoke the Church of England into a religious revival. A beautifully tarred road ran past it, and thirty to forty motor-cars at a time were drawn up in front of it. It bulged with people redolent of the Stock Exchange and the third line of the chorus. They sat in rows on the veranda, drinking, smoking and playing with toy dogs. Scent and fat fought with the smell of petrol for the major appeal to one's olfactory organs.

The hotel put up its prices unceasingly, but it seemed that nothing was prohibitive. European wars and petrol restrictions appeared to be without effect on the numbers of joy-riders.

Tin plates exhibiting advertisements of motor

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accessories lined the roads, and an enormous notice-board made its appearance during the war, giving full and explicit direction as to how to reach Box Hill Station on the London and Brighton Railway. And every Sunday morning the trains of the Railway Company belched forth scores and scores of people who had come to spend a day in the country. Whole families of prosperous munition makers swarmed up the sides of Box Hill, littering the grass with ginger-beer bottles and paper bags after their fashion, and evoking swing-boats, giant strides and troops of underfed, overworked little donkeys to carry their children for joy rides at the top of the hill.

The strenuous walker, anxious for scenery and calm, avoided Box Hill on a Sunday. Sightseeing at Meredith's Cottage on that day was a pleasure too dear at the price.

And it was the *inn* at Burford Bridge—the word “inn” is important—that not forty years ago had inspired in Stevenson a fancy of romance, a fancy that “some frosty night a horseman on a tragic errand would rattle with his whip on the green shutters of the inn at Burford!” Meredith too had written at Box Hill. . . .

This sort of thing was happening more or less all over Surrey. Every Sunday it was as if the suburbs had spawned, and the big houses grew in time to be surrounded by a sort of rash of red villas, like the rash that surrounds a tumour or some other unhealthy growth. Bookham, Esher, Claygate, and, farther to the east, Woldingham and Caterham, had already been overtaken by the malady.

But there were places still untouched, out of reach of any but the South-Eastern and Chatham Railway,

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which is no communication at all, and away from the high roads. Blackheath and Pitch Hill are out of reach of any but the most adventurous week-enders.

The country round Patching is flat and green. If you cut right across it south-west towards Holmwood you come, once Hockley Green is left behind, to lonely places—places where the nearest house is a mile and a half away (a good distance this for Surrey), where there is one post only a day, and when it is boggy, as it often is, not even that.

The Pramps' house possessed all the beauties and the inconveniences of the country residence beloved by artists—that is to say, it was an Elizabethan residence covered with ivy, with lattice windows, stone-flagged kitchen, oak beams, rafters, ingle-nooks, open fire-places where the proverbial ox could have been, but never was, roasted, and furniture to match. On the other hand, it had no gas; all the water had to be pumped; there was no bath and there was a sawdust arrangement out of doors.

Hither the Pramp family had retired, Mrs. Pramp with the intention of getting to know the county people, Mr. Pramp to give himself to those activities of the stomach which the experience of forty years' administration and the conversation of his wife had convinced him offered the only prospect of permanent and unalloyed pleasure.

Alas! for the vanity of human desire! All went well until one day, on a visit to Town, Mrs. Pramp was taken to lunch at a vegetarian restaurant. She returned a temporarily changed woman. Not only was it wrong on humanitarian grounds for man to prey upon the animals, not only did the flesh food thereby obtained coarsen the spirit, dull the imagination and



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brutalize the senses, but, until Mrs. Pramp herself set an example by refusing to allow her household to batten upon animal flesh, there was no hope that the horrible custom would ever die out.

It was by the action of individuals, she told the horrified Mr. Pramp, that society is ultimately moved : for was not society, after all, simply an aggregate of individuals ? Somebody with the courage of his convictions must take a line sometime ; a beginning must be made, an example set. One could only hope that others would be influenced by it.

"Even if they are not," she finished conclusively, "you would not have me refuse to live up to the highest, as I see it ? I can't deny the light that is in me, can I, dear ?"

Mr. Pramp deprecated the discussion being dragged up to these high levels. He didn't want to interfere with his wife's "lights," as she saw them, but he saw no reason why they should be shed upon himself. He pointed out that science recognized no ultimate difference between the animal, the vegetable and even the mineral worlds, that the chain of life was continuous from the lowest to the highest without stop or break, and that even Holy Writ, in complete reconciliation, as so often with the latest discoveries of science, recognized this in its inspired statement that "all flesh is as grass." He marshalled all his arguments, he summoned all his reasons in defence of his threatened stomach. But he summoned them in vain. Mrs. Pramp was adamant. The strength of her convictions, while she possessed them, was only equalled by their evanescence. Being a woman, she had constant need of belief. She never believed for long, but while she believed, she believed to some purpose.



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And vegetarianism was only a part of the new creed ; an important part, but not the whole. The flesh must be generally mortified. The chastening involved in the abstention from meat was not in itself sufficient, not sufficient, that is, for the achievement of that complete freedom of the mind, that wholesale emancipation of the spirit from the gross and the carnal, which was her real aim. The object of food was to maintain life, and life could be easily maintained on a tithe of the average consumption of the average man. Augustus, for instance, so far from making use of food merely to maintain life, definitely allowed it to injure him by eating far more than was good for his health. But then Augustus did not believe that the object of food had anything to do with maintaining life. He believed that the object of food was to give pleasure, and said so. All to no purpose. Mrs. Pramp held the whip-hand, and her husband could only sigh for the flesh-pots of the past, alleviate his enforced æstheticism by surreptitious visits to the local hotel, and hope that the caprice would be of not more than average duration. Meantime he maintained his digestion in silence, while every kind of patent food, every nauseous elaboration that simplified cooking devices could produce, were introduced into the house. The worst atrocities of the nut butter, "compacto" cake and whole-meal bread type figured on the breakfast-table. Fruit—stewed fruit out of tins, that is to say—was a staple of every meal. Nuts and a sere old cheese were pressed upon reluctant guests, and the jam, instead of being made of one fruit only, professed to be a mixture of three or four, and was, in fact, a product of none. Tea was weakened by boiled milk—"so much healthier, you know," said Mrs. Pramp ; "when it is boiled, it

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kills the germs"—so that one's teacup came to look like a cesspool trying to resist a municipal attempt to turn it into a pond.

The trouble about vegetarianism is that it requires a culinary excellence far beyond the achievement of the average British housewife to make its concoctions in the smallest degree palatable. Otherwise, what should have been an appetizing dish remains a mere mess of calories. Vegetarianism is, in fact, a challenge to the highest, and of this the ordinary cook is quite oblivious, regarding it as a dodge to simplify cooking and abolish grease, rather than as an elaboration of her art, requiring her to put forth the utmost of her power to compensate for the barrenness of her materials.

The vegetarian cook who was substituted for the old chef Mr. Pramp had brought from India was a nice woman, but her food was beyond description. She had not learnt that the main reason why people eat is, not because they wish to maintain life, but because, as Mr. Pramp asserted, it is a pleasant thing to do, and her food was uncompromisingly healthy.

All this had happened some two years ago, and Mr. Pramp, who considered that he had lost all his serenity of mind and a clear stone in weight since the beginning of the nut and herb régime, began to fear that he would slowly waste away into his grave, when, most providentially for his peace of stomach, the war came.

Mrs. Pramp owned no superior in patriotism, and when the catastrophe occurred, thought it due to herself and to her country to effect a complete change in her manner of life. Thus she now came down to breakfast at eight-thirty instead of having it brought to her in bed at ten, found it necessary to increase her dress allowance—for one must dress simply in these

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times of trouble, and plain stuffs are always so expensive—took in two more newspapers, made frequent journeys to London, took down all the pictures in Mr. Pramp's study and replaced them by maps, served on numberless committees and always had two, and sometimes three, young officers staying in the house. It was partly due to this latter circumstance ("you can't expect a man to fight on nuts and lettuce," as she put it), more perhaps to the general feeling that the war had changed everything, that her vegetarianism fell from her like a worn-out garment. These were stern days, and, much as a vegetarian diet might clarify the intellect and refine the spirit, this was no time for intellectual exercises or spiritual aspiration. It was not indeed a time for thinking at all, but for action, and when the world had reverted to the primitive, one might pardon one's household for lapsing into beefsteak.

Mrs. Pramp, moreover, was now too busy to be messing about with cookery. The old cook brought from India was summoned from the garden, where he had been making ineffectual efforts to cultivate cabbages, and restored to full activity in the kitchen. Mr. Pramp indulged in an orgy of curries which laid him up for a week, and the house became famous even among the young officers for the excellence of its table.

Ever since that time Mrs. Pramp had never looked back. The word "vegetarian" never passed her lips, and the reaction had carried her to such lengths that Pramp felt justified in his belief that the Christmas fare would amply compensate him for his implied surrender to his mother in the little matter of the club. Besides, his aunt from the colonies was coming—his rich aunt!

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### § 3

Pramp's aunt from the colonies was a person of considerable importance. Her husband had, by the simple process of acquiring waste tracts of land and rows of unoccupied houses, and turning them respectively into race-courses and hotels, accumulated sufficient cash to enable him to buy for himself a prominent place as a representative of the people in the appropriate Colonial Parliament.

His wife, however, dazzled for a time by the successive eminences to which her husband's dollars had raised her, began to long at the age of a still attractive forty-three for the "culture" of the old country, and to stigmatize the colonies as given over to the pursuit of a ruthless moneymaking, which left no room for what she called "the educating humanities." She left her husband in a tiff, crossed to England and installed herself in one of the leading London hotels. It only sharpened the edge of Mrs. Bellairs Jones' contempt for the Colony she had left, that her husband had in her absence been elected Lord Mayor of the capital city and invested with a knighthood the better to support the dignity.

She was at the time of her appearance in the Pramp household a grass widow of a Lady Mayoress, bereft of those foundation stones, clubs and hospitals, whose openings she felt in her heart of hearts she ought to have been adorning. Her presence in the household was thus something of an event. Her wealth was indisputable, and it was commonly believed that she was loaded with presents for all the inmates. Her spirits, too, were exuberant, and the energy with which she laughed, danced, helped in the kitchen, sang the



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latest new songs at the piano and talked scandal to Mrs. Pramp left no room for doubting that she was a person at least to be reckoned with.

She and Mrs. Pramp at once struck up one of those intimate women's friendships that are known to bloom and mature in a day. Their Christian names, Nancy and Ida, were continually on one another's lips, and it was soon discovered that it was impossible for them to be together without linking their arms.

Instinctively almost they formed a mutual admiration society, of which the only rule was that the praises of the one should be perpetually in process of being sung by the other. Mrs. Pramp expressed unbounded gratitude for Nancy's gladness and blitheness of heart. The impression conveyed was that before the advent of Lady Bellairs Jones the atmosphere of the house had been one of unrelieved gloom, a supposition sufficiently countenanced by the recent illness of two of the three maids. Now the place was regarded as ablaze with life and happiness to the tune of "How Nancy does cheer us all up"; "What a ray of sunshine in the house she is"; "How I love to hear her merry laugh." Of her voice, which was execrable, she said, "It makes us all happy to hear Nancy singing at the piano."

Nancy's theme, on the other hand, was the unbounded practical capacity of Ida, combined with her kindness of heart.

"Isn't your mother wonderful, Arthur?" she would say twenty times a day to Pramp, whose natural politeness usually prompted him to reply that perhaps she was. Whether it was her sewing, her perpetual youth, her embroidery, her services at the local hospital, her jams, her histrionic powers—each phase of



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her numerous activities was the theme of fresh bursts of wonder and adulation.

At meal-times these two ladies entirely dominated the conversation, descanting each on the variety of the other's accomplishments, or, as sometimes happened, on the favourable contrast which each presented to, and the favourable effect which each produced upon, the other ladies of their acquaintance.

The main divergences from these attractive topics were the attempts made by Mr. Pramp, who was of an informative turn, to instruct Nancy in the geography and customs of the British Isles, of which she appeared refreshingly ignorant.

Thus, after she had betrayed in full measure the Colonial's expected wonder and delight at the sight of snow, he would inform her that snow was a common phenomenon in these islands and descant on the precise nature of the atmospheric condition required to produce it.

"When I was at Carlisle," he said, "we used to have snow on the ground for weeks together."

"How interesting! Where is Carlisle?" Nancy would reply.

"Oh, in the north of England," said Mr. Pramp, deeming that more precise indications of its topography would be lost upon her.

At which, surprisingly she brought out, "And where is the north of England?" whereupon Arthur, going off into uncontrollable laughter, was rebuked by his mother for showing disrespect to Nancy's natural ignorance of the geography of these islands in which she had never lived.

"You must use your imagination, Arthur," said Mrs. Pramp on another occasion when Pramp had been

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unable to retain his mirth at a description by Lady Bellairs Jones of a hospital where she had been to visit a poor wounded soldier as "lying just outside the City of Kent," "Aunt Nancy can't be expected to know as much as we do about England. You must remember that England to your auntie is quite a tiny, unimportant speck on the map. She might want to laugh at your not knowing where Batangy is, where she was born, you know. But I am sure *she* would have better manners than to do such a thing."

"Never mind, Ida," said Nancy, "I am sure Arthur didn't mean to be unkind. He was just a little thoughtless, like young men are."

"Yes, dear, but he ought not to laugh at you," said Ida with finality.

Luckily at this moment the conversation was lulled by the sounds of Rachmaninoff's prelude, the premature burial one, being brayed out by the gramophone which had recently been installed in the gardener's cottage, not more than fifty yards from the drawing-room window.

"Listen!" said Ida, with raised hand, and there was an ecstatic silence. It was a point of honour with both ladies to be passionately fond of music. Nancy's collection of songs from the halls and the revues was indeed very extensive, and Ida had had the piano tuned quite recently.

Nancy, moreover, had a daughter, Janet, in the colonies, who was alleged to be "really a lovely player," and "who could rattle off Chopin and all those fellows with the best of them." It was to the spirit of Janet that Nancy now appealed.

"What a lovely thing that is," she said, breaking the silence. "How well I know it. Janet is always

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playing it, Ida ; you wouldn't believe ; and I could sit there all day listening to her. It makes my heart feel all queer and palpitating—the best music always does, you know—and Janet plays it exquisitely and with such feeling. How well I can see her now.”

“ I'm sure she does,” said Ida. “ What is the piece, by the way ? ”

“ Oh ! one of Beethoven's *études* ! ” said Nancy airily.

“ Of course,” said Ida ; “ how stupid of me to forget.”

This time the unfortunate Arthur had to leave the room to hide his mirth. When he came back a discussion on Wagner was in progress. Ida was expressing her dislike of Wagner. He was dull and morbid and never had any tunes. “ Whenever he finds himself going off into a tune, he stops himself. I suppose he thinks it beneath him. But I dare say why I don't like it is because I've only heard his music in England. I'm so glad I never went to Germany now. I dare say Wagner would sound all right in Germany ; it has to have its proper setting, you know, and in the coarse and brutal surroundings of Germany it might sound quite all right. You know,” she continued by way of illustration, “ how horrid the bagpipes are outside Scotland, and yet they are quite nice when you hear them in the Highlands. They seem appropriate there, somehow.”

“ I don't know how it is, but I've grown to dislike anything German this last year or two,” said Nancy. “ No one at home has any German pictures left now. I had one which used to be considered a very fine picture in our dining-room at Batangy, a Madonna, you know, by Raphael, I think it was. But I took it

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down last summer because a business friend of Bert's said the woman had such a German face, it was a disgrace to have it there. And when I came to look at it, she had, you know ; you know what I mean, one of those soft, puddingy, doughy faces, something animal about it, I thought. I had the picture broken up and used to light the kitchen fire with."

And with this display of iconoclasm the ladies drifted from art and politics to the more familiar theme of the placing of the guests at the Christmas dinner, and whether the cut-glass finger bowls would be nicer than the porcelain, or the porcelain than the cut-glass.

### § 4

"Oh dear! oh dear!" said Mrs. Pramp on the morning of Christmas Day, "I don't know what's coming to Arthur!"

"What has he done now?" said Nancy.

"What hasn't he done? Sacrilege, I call it, and on Christmas Day, too. I had specially put up over his bed the pictures he used to sleep under when he was a little boy: one was that picture of a little girl kneeling down and saying her prayers, and the other was one of Our Blessed Lord talking to little children. I thought their old associations would soften him and perhaps help him to be a better boy to his mother; and this morning when I went up to his room I found he had taken them both down and thrown them under his bed. On Christmas morning, too! I do call it unkind of him, and to think how I've loved him. I can't think how he has the heart to make his mother so unhappy. He wouldn't be so selfish if he knew." Here Mrs. Pramp burst into tears. "Oh dear, oh dear, there's

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more trouble over one thing and another than over anything I know," she added enigmatically.

"What a shame," sympathized Nancy, who had not been attending very closely; "I should have thought he would sooner have a picture of Our Blessed Lord over his bed than any old racehorse."

"Racehorse," said Mrs. Pramp; "I never said anything about racehorses. I'm sure my boy knows better than to go in for such a low thing as betting. He wouldn't be his mother's son if he did. I wouldn't own him."

"I thought you said he had put up a picture of a racehorse over his bed," said Nancy.

"It's bad enough for him to take down the pictures of his childhood without putting up any racehorses. I can't think how you came to suggest such a thing, Nancy."

"I'm sorry, dear; I must have been mistaken. We are sometimes, you know, aren't we? And I expect you are worried over the dinner and all the preparations. He's no business to put you out so."

Mrs. Pramp *was* worried. The Christmas dinner and the arrangements ancillary thereto loomed over the house like an impending Moloch of good form, to which comfort, ease, security and joviality were in turn to be sacrificed, so that it became impious to breathe a word or harbour a thought in the house that did not touch directly or indirectly upon the dinner.

Five guests were coming, three gentlemen and two ladies. One of the gentlemen was the local vicar, in whose church Mr. Pramp, senior, read the lessons with considerable pomp every Sunday. There were also a married couple, notable for their mutual deafness, their consequent connubial harmony (for it was no use



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their saying unpleasant things to each other even if they had wanted to), and their skill at auction bridge, and there were Pramp's friends from London, Eric and Queenie Ashley, who had come down for the night.

Mrs. Pramp did not quite like the look of Eric and Queenie. She was a little doubtful of Queenie's antecedents; she thought her evening dress too low and Eric's too greasy. His hair was certainly too long. Her instinct of distrust was surer than she knew.

Eric and Queenie can best be described as members of the modern intelligentsia. They were Mivians and Pacifists.

As Mivians they had married, but kept this fact secret from their parents. This, in their case, was something of a feat even under modern conditions. They lived with their respective parents in the same road, in point of fact opposite to each other, and the two families had known, visited and heartily despised one another for as long as Eric and Queenie had been in existence.

Latterly the families had openly quarrelled, largely because Eric, who had something of a suburban reputation for his achievements among women, was thought to be paying too marked attentions to Queenie.

He was asked by Queenie's parents what his intentions were, and replied naturally enough that he hadn't any. He was then forbidden the house after a round-table row of a kind which it is needless to describe here, as many examples may be found in the works of Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells.

In her early twenties Queenie became emancipated. That is to say, she was introduced by Eric to the Mivian Society, and succumbed to it. She despised

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families, was in favour of women's rights and women's incomes, and replied to Eric's offer of marriage, that she didn't mind living with him for a bit, and that if marriage was the most convenient way of doing it, she didn't mind marriage; but anyhow she must have a separate establishment and control of her own income.

On these terms they were married; but as their means did not permit of two separate establishments of their own, they continued to live in their parents' houses, Queenie not daring to inform her people of the marriage for fear of active hostilities against Eric by her brothers, who were second lieutenants in the Army, and Eric maintaining a similar reticence with his sole remaining parent—his mother—who was too much of a dear old fool of a woman to make it pleasant to shock her by the news that her son was married to a girl who did not live with him.

It should be noted that although Queenie's house was closed to Eric, Eric's was not closed to Queenie; and Queenie spent half her spare time over the road—she worked for her living as private secretary to a business man—decently chaperoned by Eric's mother, an inveterate matchmaker, who spent much of her time wondering if they would ever marry.

Thus it happened that the only people who did not know of this marriage were the parents and relations of the principals. Their friends knew without exception, a circumstance which provides a singular comment upon the wide divorce between the lives of parents and children in these latter days. The parents are unacquainted with the most intimate friends of the children, in whose lives anything of importance is carefully withheld from them. In the present case the news of the marriage, common talk among at least two hundred

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people in London, never penetrated to the innocent parents.

It may be asked how long was this to last ? How long would human passion, resident presumably in husband and wife, permit this continuance of neighbourly celibacy, legitimate outlet now being sanctioned by the law of the State ? The answer is to be found in the other aspect of Eric not yet considered. Eric was a Pacifist.

A strong opponent of war on principle and of the Great War in practice, he had refused to attest when urged to do so by the business firm to which he belonged. Soon afterwards it was intimated to him, and he was cynical enough to trace sequence of cause and effect between the two events, that he could no longer be regarded as indispensable. He took no notice of the intimation and continued his duties as usual, whereupon he was granted a holiday for an indefinite period without pay.

His tribunal to whom he appealed on conscientious grounds would make him no concession, apparently on the ground that the person whose opinions were really at issue at the present juncture was not Eric but his father, and that as Eric's father had not been a Quaker, therefore, though Eric was a Quaker of his own free will, he was not in the eyes of the Military Service Act really a Quaker, and his conscientious objection could not be genuine. Eric could not but admire the chain of reasoning but deprecated the conclusion, and had now for some months past been awaiting arrest. Whether the respite was owing to the indulgence of the military authorities or to the defectiveness of their clerical machinery, it could not be expected to last, and a man who may count upon being arrested every

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day can hardly be expected to establish a permanent abode and install a wife therein.

It will be seen, then, that Mrs. Pramp was thoroughly justified in her failure to like the looks of Eric and Queenie. Still they were there now, and would have to go in to dinner with the rest.

The great question was the arrangement of the table. Nancy, as the lady pre-eminent in wealth and distinguished as something of a traveller, would sit on Mr. Pramp's right; the Vicar would, of course, sit on Mrs. Pramp's right. That much was clear. The married couple, Eric and Queenie, and Pramp formed an amorphous conglomerate of comparative nonentities whose exact allocation, beyond the fact that Pramp must take in the deaf married lady, was found so difficult that it was not settled, and was left in the end to chance.

The order of precedence for the procession from the drawing-room, where one assembled, to the dining-room, where one ate, was also an important question, requiring earnest consideration between Ida and Nancy, each insisting with a pleasing display of self-sacrifice on the other going in first with her partner. Nancy finally won the day, because Ida was so long dressing that she was late and lost the front place.

The dinner began to make itself felt from an early hour, and as the day wore on the adjuncts of this portentous feast spread themselves in an increasing wave of comestibles all over the house. The wines and dessert were laid out in the morning-room; the liqueurs and coffee apparatus in the library; the sofa spawned with crystallized fruits and Carlsbad plums; the things from the morning-room and the library had to be moved into Pramp's bedroom to make room for

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the dessert, coffee, etc. ; the piano had been moved into the corridor, and the inhabitants of the house, when not engaged in talking about, or otherwise preparing for, the dinner were removed to the top story to be out of the way, with the exception of Nancy, who went about all day with a solicitous face calling attention to the miracle of Ida's exertions.

"Isn't Ida wonderful, taking it all on herself like this," she would ask. "How she'll have time to get dressed as well as superintend the dinner, I don't know."

However, Ida did find time for both, and finally came down only two minutes late resplendent in white satin, but tired and a little testy.

The meal comprised nine good courses ; in case, however, any uncomfortable feeling might arise on the score that this was a household guilty of food extravagance, Ida had carefully pinned up over the mantelpiece a newspaper cutting containing a speech by the Food Controller, pleading for economy in food, as the most potent form of patriotism, the cutting being pasted on a piece of cardboard headed "To be remembered four times a day."

### § 5

"Young people have more liberty than they did in my day," the Vicar was saying. "I only hope they won't abuse it."

The speaker might have consciously modelled himself on the subject of Mr. Praed's famous poem "The Vicar," were he not obviously too simple and unaffected an old dear ever to model himself on anybody. As a young man he had been noted for his cleverness and wit ; he had obtained a double First at Oxford, and



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when he took Holy Orders soon after, the Church, more usually a *pis aller* for double Thirds, might justly pride herself on a valuable recruit.

While he still thought it a difficult thing to be clever, he bewildered his congregation by the abstruseness of his sermons, and his parishioners by the ebullience of his wit. But the desire to appear clever passed in the thirties, and his sermons grew more intelligible as they certainly became more commonplace. His wit, however, nothing could suppress, and as he had no need to make money by turning his brains to writing or reviewing, it remained unspoilt by efforts to make it give plausible reasons for the admiration of trash.

A certain genial tolerance, however, precluded his advancement in the Church. He held so obviously that no creed was sufficiently valuable to justify one in making things uncomfortable for those who did not share it, that he was suspected of lack of zeal, a suspicion which was just enough, for he could be paid no greater compliment than that implied by the common observation of his friends, that the least noticeable thing in the vicar was his religion. This failure to exhibit beliefs was perhaps the pleasantest thing about him; it was certainly the reason why people of the most various descriptions treated him as a friend and confidant, his partiality for sinners being so scandalous that one could not conceive of him as blaming them.

Mr. Pramp was a man after his own heart, and he was a constant visitor to the house, his treatment of Mrs. Pramp being perfect. To the young he was especially tolerant. He welcomed all those who prided themselves on being advanced in thought, while gently mocking at the crudities that youth and heterodoxy brought in their train. He liked the look of Eric and

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did not very much mind if he did abuse his liberty, provided he had it.

"I doubt whether it is possible for us to do that," said Eric. "The worst that can come of it is that we should make a muck of our lives. But they are our lives, and we have a right to do with them as we please. Suppose we do go to the devil: well, every one has a right to go to the devil in his own way! It is at least better than going to Heaven some one else's way."

"That's a dangerous doctrine, don't you think, and even if I were to agree to it in principle, do you admit you have nothing to learn from the knowledge and experience of those of us who at least have seen more of the world than yourselves?"

"What does your knowledge and experience come to after all? You have only experienced your own lives: does that experience give you the right to mislead those whose experience is bound to be different because their lives are different? Experience seems to me to warp the mind rather than to enlarge it. It is a sort of distorting medium that comes between a man and a true vision of the world. If, for instance, he earns his living, as most men do, he comes only to see things through the spectacles of his own profession; if he specializes in a branch of learning, his special knowledge is like a pair of blinkers, which restrict his view and focus life for him in a wrong perspective. When we know, we are at the mercy of our own facts; they narrow our vision and, from the very circumstance of their being partial, distort it. It is better to know nothing than to know some things only. God, I imagine, understands everything and knows nothing."

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"God knows at least the futility of our attempt to estimate His knowledge."

"Well, whatever be your theory of the value of experience," pursued Eric, "look at its effect in practice. Old men rule the world, old men with experience, mind you, old men chosen for their experience, and they are driving it to destruction at breakneck pace. Old men, for example, are the Governments, and look what a muddle they have made of things, their notion of governing being to be at one another's throats. If Governments were composed exclusively of men under twenty-five, I wouldn't mind betting there would be no more wars."

Mr. Pramp did not like the turn the conversation was taking. He had long had occasion to view with apprehension the inconvenient, not to say improper remarks, that his son would insist on making about the war, and had learnt to steer warily round that all-absorbing topic at any rate in the shallows of mixed society. It seemed that Arthur's friends were evincing the same unpleasant symptoms as Arthur himself. It would never do to pain the dear Vicar, the weight of whose years was so apparent that he could not help applying to himself some of Eric's sweeping and ill-judged generalizations about the old.

Mr. Pramp hastened therefore to create a diversion by reverting to that topic out of which the unfortunate discussion had arisen, the topic of Arthur's joining the Ephemeral Club. As the ladies had already withdrawn, he felt that he could express himself with more tolerance and magnanimity on the subject than he would have ventured to do in the presence of his wife.

"Well, as you were saying, Vicar," he broke in, "these young people have so much liberty nowadays

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that we seem almost to have lost the right to refuse them what they want. I expect in the long run we shall have to give way to Arthur about this ridiculous club he wants to join."

"I think you might," said the Vicar. "He's bound to join it whether you like it or not, so you might as well consent with a good grace."

But Eric, who had drunk a good deal of Madeira, once launched upon the seas of generalization, was not so easily to be diverted by the disinclination of his elders to discuss whatever lay outside their own range of interests. He was mounted on his hobby horse "Individualism," and had a long way to ride yet.

"I wonder you agree to that, Vicar," he said. "Don't you see that all this self-assertion of the young is but one aspect of the prevailing Individualism of the twentieth century, which is the very negation of the religion you teach."

"But Christ Himself was an Individualist. He believed in the supreme value of each human life ; in the sacredness of personality."

"And like all good Individualists He spent His time and energy in preaching Socialism. Socialism means sacrifice and subordination of the individual in the interests of society as a whole. The Individualism which was the prevailing creed in the early nineteenth century and again permeates the mind of the country to-day, expresses the refusal of the individual to subordinate himself to anything or anybody, if he can get the better of them. Darwin began it with his 'Origin of Species.' The animal who is most efficient in his own interest survives. Cultivate efficiency in your own interest to the neglect of others, if you want to live. All very pleasant this for the essentially pagan and

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conquering male of western civilization, chafing against meekness and humility for a couple of thousand years and terribly embarrassed by the renunciations of Christianity—a form of diet that has always sat ill upon his stomach. So he lapped up Darwin's evolutionary doctrines like mother's milk, and when Herbert Spencer went on to tell him that the interest of every individual in an organism was supreme over the interest of the whole organism, the doctrine of individual self-assertion was fully launched.

“Pagan to the backbone all this, mind you, for presently Nietzsche came along and pushed the theory a stage further by pointing out that the successful survivor in the struggle was obviously exempt from moral restraint. The cock on the dunghill may laugh at the moral foibles of the hens down in the yard: hence try to be the cock. All very attractive this Superman business and hopelessly unchristian. You remember Nietzsche's view of Christian morality as a commodity fit for the consumption of ‘cows, women and Englishmen.’ Meanwhile we get Oscar Wilde giving the thing an ethical twist, by making a merit of expression for its own sake in the interest of perfect self-expression, ‘The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it,’ and so forth; and Galton, Karl Pearson and the Eugenists calmly drawing up recipes for the infallible production of the efficient individual, and the elimination of the feeble, stupid, humble, meek and non-assertive, on strictly Nietzschean principles. In Germany the doctrine gets into politics and we have the individually assertive State rushing into war: in England characteristically into economics, and we get the *laissez-faire* theory of Bentham and the Mills, which means in effect the fundamental right of every



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business man to fleece the Community as much as he can within the generous limits of the law, and to sweat his workmen to the limit of their capacity to work compatible with their continued existence, this latter right, though, being somewhat curtailed by that unfortunate lapse into Collectivism known as the Factory Acts. Now the doctrine spreads to the working classes ; we see . . .”

“Surely among the working classes,” the Vicar ventured, “this prevailing doctrine you describe takes the form of Socialism, of Collectivism or of Communism, of all of which it is the essential feature that the individual must subordinate himself to society, to the State, or to the service of his fellows. Individual self-assertion is stigmatized by all these creeds as the root cause of the evils of society to-day, and as a consequence no individual, it is argued, should be paid more in power or possessions than his fellows for his services to society.”

“I am afraid all that is dreadfully out of date,” said Eric. “It is the sort of thing that idealistic Socialism used to mean twenty years ago. But all the early fire and enthusiasm have gone out of those creeds ; they have been captured by the Fabians and become respectable. Socialism used to be an affair of red ties and long hair ; it has become a business of red tape and safety razors, and no working man really believes in it. The working man has no use for good will, service and subordination, and so in place of Socialism we have Syndicalism, in which the same characteristics of assertion based on force recur ; only here it is the assertion not of the individual, but of the class. Syndicalism has no use for the State or the Community. It asserts the rights of the working class

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as producers, and blandly bids the rest of the Community to go to blazes. It is intensely individual, bidding the working classes to continue to assert their individuality by strike after strike until finally they impose it upon the Community at large by means of the General Strike. Read Sorel and see; Nietzsche's super-man is Sorel's super-working class."

"I think there is something in what you say, although I am not very well acquainted with advanced Socialist thought. But surely you are wrong in saying that Collectivism is discredited, and that the extension of social will and effort as expressed in the State is waning. Apart altogether from the additional functions assumed by the State during the war, it was even before the war extending its scope in every direction. It ran the post office, it took over the telephone service, it proposed to nationalize the railways; it was assuming responsibilities for health, housing, sanitation and Labour troubles, and extending its scope in a hundred directions. I didn't like it, I must confess. I hate the State poking its officials in at my door to see whether the dog's got rabies or the baby's teething properly; and I hate it because I, too, am an Individualist of the sort you describe, and don't like deferring to society over my drains."

"Yes, all that is true enough in a way," said Eric. "The State was extending itself all over the shop before the war; but somehow it didn't touch the individual. The individual never came across the State except when he had to pay taxes, serve on juries, or vote,—none of them activities about which he cared twopence. All the things that really mattered in his life, that is to say, whatever touched his pocket, gratified his stomach, or enriched his soul, went on quite inde-

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pendently of the State. His business cut right across the State's borders and embraced partners in different States on the other side of the world. His religion had gradually ceased to have anything to do with the State church, and went on inside queer individualistic societies like the Theosophical Society. His love affairs again! Even if he did get married in a registry office, it was in fear of public opinion and not in deference to the State. No! the State was getting gradually squeezed out of the life of the individual. The individual was reasserting himself.

"Now just take the business of marriage, for instance," continued Eric, drinking some more Madeira and warming to his subject. "Marriage is supposed to be an affair in which both the Church and the State have an interest. In so far as it is supposed to produce happiness, it comes under the surveillance of the Church; in so far as its object is to produce children, under that of the State. Marriage has never been entirely the affair of the individuals concerned. That is why we make a public exhibition of weddings. Now it is part of the Individualism of the age that both Church and State are being gradually squeezed out of marriage. People marry now mainly as a matter of convenience, because they can't stand the prying of landladies, or as a matter of necessity to legitimize their unborn children. Marriage is the most unimportant of episodes in a purely individual relationship that has usually extended for some time before it. Similarly divorce, which is also a State institution, is practically falling into disuse except among society, to whom it gives the pleasing effect of a new sensation, and the middle classes who are, of course, hopelessly moral. People never dream of bringing in the State or the law

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with their clumsy machinery, when they have had enough of each other ; they just make other arrangements. Nobody, in fact, in his senses would think of submitting his intimate personal relationships, which are something delicate and complex, to the handling of the State, whose only method of disentangling a Gordian knot is to cut it with a bludgeon.

Marriage only subsists and will only continue to subsist as a State institution so long as the business of being a wife remains the only form of livelihood open to most women. While it does, they want State regulations to guarantee the continuance of their employment, and prevent their being turned on the streets, as often as a husband changes his mind and his wife. That is why women are always so bitterly resentful of any attack on marriage and the family system, a resentment which poses as moral indignation, but is really economic at bottom, being akin to the Trade Union objection to dilution. That is why women are such dragons of intolerance to their so-called erring sisters ; I do not mean to prostitutes, whom they tolerate, knowing them to be the necessary condition of their own purity—but to those who refuse to allow their affections to be confined within the limited channels prescribed by the law. Such women are hated and feared as amateurs are hated and feared by professionals.”

Mr. Pramp again did not like the turn the conversation was taking. He did not understand all that Eric was saying, but he felt pretty sure that the Vicar did, and that it was as bad, if not worse, than Eric on the war.

“ Well, well, Mr. Ashley,” he said, “ we are perhaps getting too interested in our conversation and forgetting the ladies. Shall we adjourn ? ”



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The appearance of the drawing-room conveyed that atmosphere of silent reproach which usually awaits gentlemen whose conversation has kept them beyond the allotted period. It was a drawing-room of the old-fashioned sort, the particular joy and sanctum of Mrs. Pramp. The main object in furnishing it seemed to have been to ascertain how many different kinds of articles an unoffending room could be made to hold ; the main purpose of the furniture to conceal other furniture. Tables of knick-knacks abounded, the wall was covered with pictures and brackets, the mantelpiece was hidden under a scurf of ornaments, and draperies of the pretty variety adorned everything. Even the legs of the grand piano were draped, apparently in the belief that, being legs, they were in some obscure way indecent. It was one of those rooms in which it was impossible to be at ease either in body or mind, a regular stiff collar of a room.

The elder ladies—Mrs. Pramp, Nancy and the deaf lady—having sewed and gossiped themselves into a torpor suitable for the reception of their husbands, sat in rigid attitudes in their chairs, that looked like arm-chairs, but were not, before the fire. Queenie, who quite obviously had not mixed, was listlessly turning over piles of music near the piano.

Mr. Pramp, who seemed fated to create diversions that evening, felt that something ought to be done, and vaguely remembering a reference by his son to Mrs. Ashley's "wonderful playing," asked if she had performed at the piano. No ! It seemed she had not.

"Then will you play something to us now, Mrs. Ashley ?" he said.

"Oh, do," put in Nancy. "I simply adore music. I was only telling Ida the other night how little of it I



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had heard since I've been in England. Somebody was playing that thing of Beethoven's, 'Melody,' I think it is called, down at the gardener's cottage, and it brought back such memories."

"But don't you play yourself?" said Queenie, politely going to the piano.

"Oh, a little to amuse myself, you know. But I only play ragtimes and songs, and I always think they are really not the best kind of music, don't you? One tires of them so, you know."

Queenie played a piece of Ravel's, and followed it up with Debussy's "*Cathédrale Engloutie*." The applause was decorous, but subdued. Nobody had liked the music, and Pramp, who worshipped Bach and Mozart, was anxious for Queenie to play what he called "real music." But the house had got on her nerves, she wanted to play something "edgy," and pieces by John Ireland (or was it Cyril Scott?)—they all sounded alike, thought Pramp—followed.

As the ingenious discords vibrated among the knick-knacks, Pramp slipped out into the smoking-room, where he found the Vicar and his father drinking port. A look of satisfaction upon their faces reflected equally their pleasure in the port and their escape from the women.

"That Mr. Ashley of yours is an interesting young man, Arthur," said Mr. Pramp, "but how he does talk."

"Yes, he's always pretty voluble, but I think that Madeira of yours accounted for most of it to-night."

"Ah, but he talks well, my boy," said the Vicar. "I disagree with much of what he said, and it has a good deal of the hardness and empty broad-mindedness of the ideas of a very young man; but his account of the

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return of Individualism to the world is, I think, substantially a just one."

"Oh, that's all right enough," said Pramp. "You've only to go into the drawing-room now and hear his wife playing modern music to see how universal it is."

"I am afraid I don't quite see the connexion."

"Well, all the great musicians of the past—Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Handel—tried in their music to create something beautiful. In order to be beautiful it had to have a certain amount of form—I mean, it had to have a fairly continuous and coherent structure—and it must not entirely disown melody. It was music that expressed the soul of the composer right enough, but his object in composing it was not this expression of himself. Like all great art, it transcends the personality of the composer and achieves the impersonality of the universal." (Pramp, who, it will be remembered, had read Philosophy at Oxford, was rather proud of his metaphysical terms.) "That is why this music of the great classical epoch is so absorbing and so objective, if I may use such a word. It doesn't allow you to think of anything at all except itself; it certainly does not make you wonder what sort of a person the composer was, or what he meant by this or that; it does not even make you think of yourself by reminding you of your own past, of a love affair, or the scent of a lady's hair—as, for instance, Chopin's music does. You don't, in fact, think at all when listening to it; you are just lost in the music."

"Now the moderns—Stravinsky, Arensky, Mombomsky and the Russians generally—they don't want to achieve the impersonality of the universal or anything like that: they don't want even to create anything beautiful. All they want to do is to express themselves, to put their own individuality into music. Their

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music is intensely personal and individual stuff, like some one speaking to you rather intimately, and because their personality is pretty much like your own you find that their music, instead of making you lose yourself in it, sets you thinking about yourself. You are reminded of scenes and passions you yourself have known, instead of being lifted into a realm greater than any you have ever known.

“Now all this business of making music express things, desires, moods, hopes, passions, griefs and so on, which is just one more aspect of Eric’s Individualism, is a perversion of its function, a putting of music to a wrong use. Considered as a medium of expression, music is simply an inadequate substitute for words. It may express certain emotions in a vague sort of way, but it cannot convey scenes or events with anything like the accuracy of words. But the modern musician won’t see this. He cannot create, so he tries to represent and express, and we get programme music. It shows how fundamentally wrong is the attempt to convey scenes or even memories by means of music, that one of your modern pieces entitled ‘Night in the Woods’ might just as well call itself ‘Morning by the Fountain’ for all the notion it conveys to you of either.”

“But all this, interesting as it is, my boy, as a criticism of modern musical tendencies, has nothing to do with Individualism.”

“Perhaps very little. I only brought it in to show that once you begin using music as a means of conveying or expressing anything, whether it is your own emotions in a park by the moonlight, or the phosphorescent glow of a bad sardine, you are putting it to a wrong use. For one thing, it makes the merit of the music depend upon the extent to which the audience feel the emo-

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tions which it is intended to convey, which is absurd. You can't have Bach judged dull simply because the audience of shopkeepers, who are usually too tired to listen to him at the fag ends of the promenades in London, don't respond.

"But what is more important is the fact that musicians only resort to this expression business when they haven't the genius to create. Because they can't hold you by constructing a beautiful thing, they endeavour to attract your attention by evolving a startling discord. The diminished sevenths and cacophonous disharmonies, the ingenious structures of ill-mated notes and discontinuous chords flitting in sheer caprice from one end of the keyboard to the other, that go to make up a modern composition, are but so many conjurors' tricks, musical sleights of hand, designed to disguise the fundamentally jejune imagination of the composer."

"That's very fine," laughed Mr. Pramp, "and quite unnecessarily heated. I suppose, though, that some musical young miss, who likes Debussy, or even composes a bit on her own has been jilting you. You don't indulge in such fierce rhetoric about modern painting, do you?"

"Oh, I don't know much about painting; but it seems to me to be on much the same lines. It is because the modern artist has lost the art which enabled the Dutch and Italians to idealize the real by representing only its essence and omitting the superfluous that they make a merit of indicating it only. By all means indicate a telegraph pole when you can't paint one. Very clever and meritorious and all that, but don't go on to assert that by putting down a few sketchy lines and curves that might as well be a hen-coop, you have in some mysterious way got hold of

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the real nature and being of the telegraph pole, in a way that the man who has merely painted it has missed.

“Of course it’s only another phase of Individualism really. It is more important to express yourself than to represent or idealize the real. That is why modern pictures, however much they may embody the soul of the artist, rarely embody anything else. I know as a fact that a picture which appeared in an exhibition last year entitled ‘Portrait of Mrs. Jones,’ was hung again this year at the Leicester Galleries without so much as a line being altered over the title, ‘Blast Furnaces at Stoke.’ It looked about equally like either.”

This sally provoked the laugh which its untruthfulness deserved, and as Eric entered at the same moment, the Vicar explained to him with what unsoundness his thesis of the return to Individualism had been extended to the regions of painting and music. Eric was an artist in that he held high notions as to the sacred mission of art. Moreover, he disliked agreement from any quarter. He promptly repudiated the application of his views to the creations of art, and expressed himself as convinced that what young Pramp had said must be nonsense anyhow. “Pramp thinks that every modern ass who wants to read decadent poetry by candle-light on a red mat is an artist.”

They were by this time all too muddled from want of sleep or excess of Madeira to pursue any subject with sense, but the Vicar, whose gravity was only increased by wine, insisted on knowing whether Eric thought that these developments of Individualism which he had described were matters for regret or gratification.

“That depends on the angle of approach. Every-



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body wants Individualism for himself and resents it in others. The whole problem of politics is, in fact, how to reconcile your desire to tread on the corns of as many other people as you want to, with your prepossession in favour of keeping your own intact. Personally I think it is all to the good in those spheres which are exempt from the operations of force, that is to say, in the spheres in which corn-stamping is impossible, those of art and literature, for instance; and that is where Pramp, who can't understand a line of poetry and thinks music ought to be a sort of glorified pattern, a piece of prettily woven tapestry, probably talked undiluted rot. The Irish Theatre movement, which was intimately Individualist in the national sense, was all to the good. Rivalry and emulation between nations in these spheres bring out the best work, it being always left to the artist to find the highest expression for the individuality of a nation. But I am all against Individualism in politics. It is simply Darwinism, the cult of the fittest, the struggle for survival, the weaker going to the wall and the poor to blazes: Eugenics, Nietzsche's superman, Benthamism, Anarchism, you know, and all that. Now, all that is very well for animals; but Christ, among others who have apparently detected the difference, knew better for men. Besides, Individualism was the cult of the nineteenth century, the most horrible period known to history. The only good thing about the nineteenth century was its abrupt conclusion, and that was due, not to it, but to the calendar. An Individualism of calendars—inspiring thought! I shall go to bed on that. Anyhow, you had better let Pramp join this club of his. That's the only way to make him sick of it."

# THE FAMILY AND THE CLUB

## § 6

The Ephemeral Club was founded by a number of people, who were sufficiently sceptical with regard to their own convictions to admit that they would probably change them. It will be inferred therefore that it was mainly a club of young people. Just at this time most of them maintained an attitude of dyspeptic hostility to the war, were animated by a contempt for patriotism, and professed a vague belief in internationalism, the class war and revolution. They realized, however, that in a few years, unless they were to regard themselves as exempt from the frailties of human mentality, they would probably subside into Clapham and maintain the Church, the State, marriage and an allotment.

On principle they were Revolutionaries ; just as on principle they were Pacifists ; but the contradiction of creed was more apparent than real. The revolution was a matter of theory, whereas the war was a matter of fact ; were the former ever to materialize, it would be found that the barricade was as abhorrent to them as the barracks. Meanwhile, however, the revolution considerably enough delayed itself and might be provoked with impunity. And so the Ephemeralists spent their time in political provocation, hanging on to the parlour fringes of revolution and poking a fire which they devoutly hoped would never burst into flames. As a safeguard in case of unpleasant eventualities they maintained a persistently open mind, and clung with noble tenacity to their right to change their opinions as often as they pleased. It was to mark this receptivity to ideas that they called their club the Ephemeral Club, and it was expected of all of its members

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that their minds should be moving staircases, so that no member would ever know of another from day to day on which step he or she would be. This characteristic would, it was hoped, preclude undue dogmatism and would at least invest the discussions of the club with the important attribute of surprise.

The people who joined were certainly surprising. They included most of those waifs and strays of the intelligentsia who had resolutely refused to participate in the war, had determined to ignore it as much as it would let them, and were consequently out of work or doing work of national importance as conscientious objectors.

There was a classical don who worked in a bakery, a journalist who spent his days in a railway goods yard, and numbers of writers, artists and clerks who for the first time in their lives came into daily contact with the land, and devoted their high and varied attainments to the nurture of cabbages.

Their womenfolk, usually in a state of suppressed and simmering exasperation, which not even the concession of the vote had allayed, were mostly inappropriately employed in business offices, where the necessity of keeping quiet about their convictions and their husbands by day, sent them indignantly to the club to let off revolutionary steam by night. There were also a number of women writers who, under the name of novels, had produced autobiographies or diaries of their emotional states, in which their passions, private affairs and ideas were displayed in the shop window for the inspection of the public at a maximum fee of six shillings.

A few quite eminent though unpopular men joined the club at the outset : Pacifist politicians, writers and publishers of books hostile to the war, members of the

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U.D.C. and well-known Russian revolutionaries. These being the élite, speedily found the place overcrowded for them by the numbers of the unknown, anxious to claim acquaintance with the great ; so that it came to be said of the club that it was a place where the herd went to meet the knuts, and from which the knuts stayed away to avoid meeting the herd.

Finally there was an amorphous body of artistic riff-raff, which is the best London can do in the way of Bohemians : young men with long hair curling on to their shoulders, young women with short hair cropped close over their ears, those whose sex was indeterminate both as to costume and voice and those who were neither men nor women but Slade.

The relationships, intimacies and consequent habitats of these people changed with a kaleidoscopic rapidity with which even the Secretary, whose business it was to keep in touch with the addresses of the members, could not cope. The couples were shuffled and reshuffled like a pack of cards, and every time you entered the smoking-room you found there had been a new deal.

The rapidity of these changes was mainly instigated by the women ; the men were chiefly responsible for their reach and scope. Many of the men, while holding that love should be free and communal, regarded friendship with their own sex as an intimate and permanent possession, a piece of private property, to the sacred laws of which women must bow. Greater love than this hath no man, that he should lay down his wife for his friend, and many were ready, aye, eager to make this sacrifice on the altar of friendship, on terms of exchange in kind if it might be, but if not, ungrudgingly as friends should.

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It was found, alas, only too often that the women were inconsiderate enough to object to these sacrifices, and the complications arising from the woman's absurd demand that she should love before she gave herself, with the resultant shattering of many pretty schemes concocted in male smoking-rooms for a distribution of the female members of the club among the male, provided diverting matter for those interested in observing the habits of the intelligentsia.

The club rapidly delegated itself into small sections for the discussion of interesting or intimate topics, in which it was felt that truth might more readily be revealed by the give and take of the Socratic method than by the rhetoric of the full-dress debate. A section discussed international politics, another sexual psychology, another the education of parents, another the organization of Trade Unions.

Every week, however, a night was set aside for a general discussion, in which the whole club participated. Then the intelligentsia could at last hear the lectures they wished to hear, lectures in which they got the stark truth about Russia, or Ireland, or the Press, or whatever the special grievance of the moment happened to be, without fear or prejudice, and naturally without bias.

For the rest, the place was comfortably but not luxuriously furnished; all the more advanced periodicals were available, and women could smoke in all the rooms. A dining-room was provided in which cheap but homely meals could be obtained, the cooking, though simple, being uniformly good.

From the very first the influence of the women at the club was predominant. In numbers alone they surpassed the men, whose ranks were sadly depleted by the



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prisons, the bakeries and the farms on which perforce they spent all or most of their time.

May Bowsher, the woman's Trade Union organizer, was one of the most prominent; Miss Bright, who wrote witty articles in Labour papers wherein bright little Annies confuted Jingo uncles, successful profiteers and patriotic canvassers, also found time to favour the club meetings with her superfluous epigrams.

These women, who had for years given their brains and energy to leading the women's movement to victory and the vote, found the wind somewhat taken out of their sails by the embarrassing concession which had at last given the vote to them. Like many people who concentrate on a single object, they found that success had laid waste their interests and devastated their lives, or had at least destroyed their justification for living. As a consequence their talents were diverted to vague and discussive assaults upon the war, upon the men who made it in particular, and thence upon men in general.

### § 7

This was the assembly into which Pramp, with the secret connivance of his father, was duly admitted, and he had enjoyed the privileges of membership for some months, when Mrs. Pramp took her great decision. This decision was nothing less than to go to London, pay a surprise visit to the club, and see for herself whether it was a suitable body for her young son to belong to.

His conversation of late had given her cause for increasing disquietude. He rarely put in an appearance at Patching, and poor Mrs. Pramp did not know whether to be the more relieved or hurt at his long

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absences. When he did come he either refused to talk, which was bad enough, or he said disconcerting things, which was worse.

"That boy is a great disappointment to me," she remarked to Nancy. "It doesn't matter what you do for him, he's always the same, selfish and ungracious. He sneers at everything that is good, sometimes even at sacred things, and thinks he knows better than his father and mother, and even the dear vicar."

"Yes," sympathized Nancy, "he's very difficult, I'm sure ; and when he does talk you never know what he is going to say next. Most unusual I call it."

"I don't know what has put such things in his head," said Ida. "I'm sure he doesn't get it from me. It must be those Socialists he goes with. I never did approve of them and I never shall. Professional grumblers I call them !"

But Mrs. Pramp was sufficiently open-minded not to pass a final judgment of disapprobation until she had good grounds to justify it. She would suspend judgment for the time and go and see for herself what this club was like. So, bravely sacrificing her feelings to her son's interests, she travelled up to town, arrived at the club at about half-past eight in the evening, and asked for Arthur.

Arthur, it seemed, was not in, but might be expected later ; so Mrs. Pramp went boldly into the lounge to take stock of the place, and wait for him.

Round the chief fireplace a group of men and women was sitting, talking and discussing together in loud voices. Mrs. Pramp could not have helped hearing even if she had wished. But she did not wish. She was one of those people for whom other people's letters and other people's conversation had an irresistible fas-

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cination. She read the former and listened to the latter whenever she could on principle, and because an unexpected streak of humility in her character made her believe that whatever was not meant for her must inevitably and for that very reason be fascinating or intriguing, or wickedly palpitating with life and excitement.

Beside, in this case she was interested in the cut and texture of the women's clothes. They wore thick brown stockings, and shoes whose heels were not appreciably higher than those of a man. A business-like skirt and blouse, or in some cases a homogeneous garment of a plain and sober stuff stretching from the neck to the ankles failed to disguise the total absence of corsets. Nowhere was there any attempt to turn a bad figure into a good one, or under the appearance of disguising, to reveal in a salient form those portions of the figure which did happen to be presentable. Mrs. Pramp thought she had never seen anything so unfashionable.

The first speaker to attract her attention was Miss Bowsher. She was a bright, eager-looking little woman, with a hooked nose and beady brown eyes. She had a voice whose pleasantness not even twenty years of public speaking had been able wholly to destroy, and an unusually good figure. Altogether she reminded one of a bird, and she was talking, as usual, about the future of her sex.

She was urging the importance of women retaining the various war duties they had taken up. Of course women must stay in Government offices; of course they must remain on the buses and the tubes. Why should they give up the comparatively lucrative jobs they had obtained in factories to go back to the

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drudgery of housework, or the servility of domestic service ?

“ I think that women for the first time in their history have begun—only begun, mind you—to come into their own, and they are not going to give it up in a hurry.”

It was Anstruther, the eminent publicist, who took up a comparatively reactionary line.

“ Women,” he said, “ should return to their normal sphere, the home. I don’t for a moment suggest that compulsion should be applied. I simply think, as a question of psychology, that women are not naturally fitted for industry and the professions. Give women a free choice and you’ll find that the vast majority will prefer looking after their husbands, their children and their homes to any other occupation.”

“ How do you explain the insurgence of women that lay behind the suffragette movement ? ” said Miss Bright. “ That showed that women were not content to go on with the time-honoured occupations of making beds, laying the table and washing up.

“ Women for the last fifty years have been like children who wish for the moon only because they can’t have it. The child presented with the moon would quickly find itself bored to tears with the moon, even if no worse fate befell him. So women only clamoured to be bishops, priests, lawyers and politicians because they were arbitrarily forbidden these things. Give them the right, and I believe they would be the last to take advantage of it ; remove the barrier, and they would be the last to pass through. They would soon find that the fire of public life burnt their fingers and retire contentedly to their pots and pans. Unlock the door and the prisoner is never so anxious to escape, especially if it is her own house door. So I would

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remove all artificial barriers that prevent women from preaching, pleading and politicianizing, not because I believe they are fit to do these things, but because I believe they are not ; but I also believe that the only way to convince them of this is to let them try for themselves."

"This is sheer reaction," put in old Peabody, who had persistently hung on to the skirts of every advanced movement that had ever been known. "You assume, I suppose, that woman is fundamentally inferior to man, that she is fundamentally incapable of performing the various functions men have hitherto arrogated to themselves."

"It isn't a question of inferiority or superiority," said Anstruther. "It's simply that woman is fundamentally different. I don't care whether she was the same once and you say that her difference is due to centuries of bad education and segregation. That doesn't alter the fact that she is different now. Of course all generalizations about women are more or less absurd, and are more or less as true both as their opposites and as the same generalizations about men, but this much, at least, seems certain : women are more conservative and uniform among themselves than men are ; they are less versatile, exhibiting a far smaller degree of variability for good or ill. Women, for instance, are not wozzlers."

"What on earth's that ?" said Eric, who had for once been patiently listening.

"A 'wozzler' is a person who spends his days wearing out the knees of his breeches praying, and his nights wearing out the seat of his breeches backsliding."

"Silly ass !" said Eric.

"Women are not wozzlers intellectually, just as they



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are not wozzlers morally. Women do not rise to the heights just as they do not sink to the depths of men. There are no women of genius except unrepresentative women, but then no woman could perpetrate the sillier modern poetry."

"And what does all this come to?" said Peabody. "Even if women are more conservative and less variable, which I deny, why should they stay at home? Does it seem right and just to you that men should for ever confine women to the horizon of the kitchen? Must a woman spend all her life beating out her soul against the scullery sink?"—a favourite cliché this of old Peabody's which had never failed to move even the most hostile meeting.

"The point is that women's lack of versatility, their lack of variability as a sex means that whereas men have a thousand and one occupations, none of which are more particularly a man's than any other, woman has only one occupation which can be specified as particularly a woman's and which almost every woman is at heart contented to perform, namely, the occupation of looking after a man and bearing his children."

"Fiddlesticks," said Miss Bowsher.

"Sour grapes," murmured Eric à propos of the Bowsher's ejaculation.

"But is it fiddlesticks?" said Anstruther. "How many women has one seen—you must be as familiar with the phenomenon as I am—young, promising University women, who seem likely to make their mark in science, in medicine or in art, giving up their careers, their outside interests and all that they promise without a moment's hesitation, directly the right man comes along and devoting themselves to him and to his children for the rest of their days: subsiding, if you like,

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into household drudges? It must be a phenomenon which has withdrawn numberless promising young recruits from the women's movement: a very thorn in your flesh."

"Women in Government offices too!" said Eric. "They don't really care for the work. They are only marking time till they get married, hundreds and hundreds of 'em, half of whom spend their time in making tea for the other half."

"That is a cheap gibe," said Peabody, "very stale and quite untrue. The work women have put in during the war has been wonderful, simply wonderful, I tell you. I wouldn't have believed they had it in 'em."

"But there is more to it than that," broke in Eric, disregarding Peabody's interruption. "Let us suppose that all Miss Bowsher says is true; that the main feminist contentions, in so far as they assume the form of prophecy, are correct as a forecast of woman's place in the future, and that women will not, broadly speaking, return to the domestic sphere. Don't you see that such a development threatens with extinction the women's movement itself?"

"I am glad that I can't see that," said Miss Bright. "The women's movement will go on gathering force in the future as it has in the past."

"But consider the facts. As every one knows, there already exists in this country a selective birth-rate of a very remarkable kind. The very poor and, in a lesser degree, the very rich multiply exceedingly. Idle and imbecile women, unemployable men, with no security, no stake in the country and no sense of responsibility, feeling perhaps that they cannot be much worse off than they are at present, and

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being unable anyhow to afford preventatives, have enormous families. The middle-classes, and more especially the thinking portions of the middle-classes, exercise rigid birth control, and are actually decreasing in numbers. They rarely have families of more than two or three children. This is partly due to the revolt of all educated women against being treated as mere child-producing machines. But when, as happens even more frequently, the woman is imbued with feminism and advanced ideas the refusal to subside into a maternal drudge is still more marked.

“The necessity for economy is in itself an important deterrent. The desire to live one’s own life operates equally strongly. Where a woman has a life of her own to lead, where she has outside interests and pursuits, and the desire to earn an income of her own, she will see in every child a hindrance to the time and energy she requires for the development of her own personality. Thus she will have one child, so as not to miss the experience, and stop at that. Political women are notoriously childless, and just in proportion as a woman is gifted with more energy, initiative, foresight and ambition than the average, in that degree does she revolt against wasting her gifts on that which the veriest little suburban doll or peasant wench can accomplish as well or better than she can. Thus the best elements among women tend to an automatic sterilization of themselves. The mere fact that a woman is a feminist is a predisposing factor against her reproducing herself and consequently against her reproducing her ideas.

“The upshot is that a time will come when the adherents of feminism and the wider life for women become so numerous that they will fail to keep up their num-

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bers, through unwillingness or inability to bear children. That climax is not reached as yet. At present the advanced women's movement continues to draw recruits from the children of mothers old-fashioned enough to have them ; but this source of supply is not limitless, and advanced women fail and will fail increasingly from the causes I have suggested to keep up their numbers from their own offspring. This is the Nemesis that waits on the women's movements, automatic extinction from their own excess of zeal."

"Very closely reasoned," said Miss Bright, "but I am not yet convinced that careers for women are incompatible with child-bearing."

"Careers in industry certainly are, as any statistics of infant mortality among factory women will show. Careers for women in clerical and sedentary occupations may not be dogged with the same fate, but the number of women following them are not sufficient to affect the argument."

"Supposing the conclusion true, should it deter us from developing ourselves as we see fit ? "

"Perhaps not, but that raises a different point. And yet, although on the ground that life on the whole is not worth living, one may contemplate with equanimity the extinction of the race through the failure of its members to bear sufficient children, I must say I shrink from a prospect in which the least valuable elements of the community perpetuate themselves and increase, while the more valuable die out ; that is a reversion to barbarism or something like it."

"Then you do hold that advanced women are valuable, more valuable than the old-fashioned child-bearing machine ? " said Miss Bowsher. "Surely there is a flaw somewhere. If you deprecate the woman who

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poaches on masculine preserves, why deplore her extinction ? ”

“ You are being too logical for me,” said Eric. “ I must confine myself to pointing out the possibility of extinction without approving or disapproving.”

“ This is all rotten bad biology,” said old Peabody, “ and what’s more, it’s quite unfair to the wonderful things women have done. I tell you that the things women have done during the war have been wonderful, simply wonderful. Nobody could have believed it, I tell you. And now they’ve made such a success at it, why shouldn’t they keep on at it ? Eh ? Now I believe in every woman going out into the world and doing whatever work nature fitted her for.”

“ Agreed, agreed,” said Eric patiently. “ We all agree that women, like everybody else, should do what they are most fitted for. The only question is, what are they most fitted for ? Now we say that a woman is most fitted for looking after her husband and her children, padding the background of his life so to speak. That is the only thing most women are fitted for.”

“ But how can you say anything so ridiculous, Mr. Ashley ? ” said Miss Bright. “ Look at the enormous success of women in the professions she has adopted, where she competes with men on equal terms.”

“ I fail to see it. Women have made a success of two professions, medicine and nursing, and they make good doctors and good nurses simply because the main part of the work consists in looking after men and children. The majority of patients are men and children, because there are more men and children in the world than women.

“ And then, you know,” pursued Eric, warming to his favourite topic, on which we have already heard him



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at some length, "women are the guardians of morality, the upholders of the family system. Why? Because they are more moral than men? Not a bit of it! It is because the business of being a wife is the only profession open to them. And they oppose any attempt to subvert the family, not only on the economic ground that it would undermine their means of livelihood, but because as guardians of the continuance of the race, they can best fulfil their function by possessing one man and one man only. Now men as a rule are different. In their heart of hearts, they want a number of women, and they want to avoid being possessed by any of them. That is God's greatest practical joke. He made men polygamous and women monogamous; hence arise troubles innumerable."

"It may once have been true," said Miss Bowsher indignantly, "that a woman's only profession was that of being a wife and mother, but it isn't true to-day; and when women get as good opportunities for education as men, they will be independent of this terrible necessity of marrying for economic reasons. That is one more reason for freeing them from the tyranny man has enforced on them."

"You are right, Miss Bowsher," said Eric gravely. "Of course, there are other professions open to a woman, at least there is one other profession, she may become a prostitute, but the difference is not very great. The prostitute sells her body to a number of men to keep her freedom, the married woman sells her freedom to one man to keep her body. Each of them is resolutely opposed to any attempt to subvert morality by the recognition and condonation of sexual intercourse outside the marriage tie. The enthusiastic amateur in love, the woman who loves for the sake of love and not for

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money or livelihood, is a menace to both and is abhorred by both. Why? For economic reasons again. The enthusiastic amateur blacklegs both the women's Trade Unions, the Trade Union of wives and the Trade Union of prostitutes."

"I can't have you talking like that, Mr. Ashley: it is not that I think it immoral, but it's so stupid. Your mother . . ." But at this point the conversation was interrupted. A large fashionably dressed woman, who had been sitting just behind the circle by the fire, was observed to get up suddenly and emphatically. For a moment she glared at the group of talkers with sombre fury. Then "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" she exclaimed, and with a snort of indignation walked majestically from the room.

Mrs. Pramp had finally made up her mind about the Ephemeral Club.

### § 8

Mrs. Pramp returned to Patching with feelings of horror. She believed in her heart that she had really been shocked, and though it would not have squared with the rôle she wished to assume of a modern woman of the world to admit the existence of such a feeling, it expressed itself in an air of unusual restraint which made her reticent about her experiences at the club. It was as though she wished to convey the impression that her sentiments were too deep for expression, her knowledge too painful to be communicated. Only she affirmed as a result of her experience that Arthur must not on any account be allowed to become a member of that club: that if he were already a member, his membership must be immediately terminated; that he must give a solemn promise never to go near the place again; and that if

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he refused to do any of these things, he must be denounced, denied access to the paternal roof, deprived of the paternal allowance, and eliminated from the paternal will.

These sentiments were conveyed with an air of quiet determination to Mr. Pramp. They were also repeated to each of the various friends and relatives of the family who visited Patching, and received their unqualified assent. They felt that they were personally involved. A member of such a society as Ida hinted at must at the best be rendered unfit for the society of gentlewomen : at the worst he might become notorious, get involved with a low woman, or make speeches against religion in Hyde Park. One never knew where that sort of thing might lead. Only Mr. Pramp, whose opinion in virtue of his control of the purse was of paramount importance, remained unexpectedly unperturbed, and it became a matter of moment to the rest of the family to make him see things as they did. His prohibition was, in fact, essential : even if the corruption of Arthur had already proceeded to the point of ignoring the authority of a parent—and it seemed only too probable that it had—he could not ignore his bank balance. Arthur had no settled profession as yet—the publishing house had been vacated for war work—he showed, in fact, no inclination to adopt one, and he could not live without his father's support.

It was resolved therefore by the various aunts, uncles and others, who felt that the honour of the family was involved, to make a mass assault on Mr. Pramp, and to convince him by the sheer weight of argument of his duty to his son.

For some days there was a gradual gathering of the Pramp clan at Patching. Only Christmas and some-

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thing unpleasant had this power of bringing the family together, and in their hearts they preferred it to be something unpleasant. It gave them more to talk about. Nancy was there, of course, ready to be shocked or sympathetic with full lungs, as the occasion required. Then there was Mr. Pramp's sister, Janet. She had married a successful merchant who, coming to London with a half-penny in his pocket in the obscurity of the past, had by dint of successfully fleecing his fellows under the name of business push and enterprise and the banner of a successful pill, amassed a fortune of some hundred thousands. This his wife knew so little how to spend that she had ruined both her figure and her complexion in trying to live up to the challenge of her income. Her horizon was circumscribed by motors, yachts, lap-dogs, meringues and cosmetics. Of these last she was fabulously acquisitive, and was ever trying the effect of new complexions. Her face had striven after the ideal of the chameleon for so long, that it had at last given way under the strain, and had now subsided into a dirty grey tint, with ravines of darker shadow between the rolls of fat. Still Janet struggled with it womanfully, and on occasions made up in vividness what she lacked in tone. The result was, at any rate, arresting, even if it conveyed an air of decadence. If you had seen her in Leicester Square you would have thought she had been ill-advised to leave the Strand.

The merchant, her husband, was considerate enough to die at the age of fifty, and Janet, who now abhorred anything to do with trade, and whose market value had gone up as her complexion had declined, had chosen another partner from among the learned professions.

She was now accompanied by her second husband, George Mills. George was a barrister of wit and sub-

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stance. His reputation for wit was partly, but not wholly, founded on his famous repartee to Mr. Justice Shanks. In prosecuting a certain workman for criminal assault, Mr. Mills had ventured to remark that the man, on leaving his public at half-past ten, immediately before the incident for which he was indicted, was "as drunk as a judge." Mr. Justice Shanks reproved him: "You should not say 'as drunk as a judge' in court: it implies disrespect; the common version of the phrase is 'as drunk as a lord.'" "I accept the correction, my lord," Mr. Mills had replied, and the remark was repeated in anecdotal gatherings of the profession as a triumph of legal wit.

Mr. Mills's substance was as undeniable as his wit. It was testified to by the wardrobe of his wife. Moreover, Janet was celebrated as a lavish entertainer in her beautiful house at Hampstead. She had succeeded in creating what has baffled so many London hostesses, a *salon*. It had endured now for more than two seasons, and on the fringe of the brilliant gatherings which graced her rooms every other Thursday evening, George could be observed refusing to be entrapped into argument or discourse on any one topic, but coruscating fitfully over the surface of many. He had no convictions and no subjects, or rather, having ceased to hold any convictions or to work at any subject, he could be at play with them all. He regarded sincerity, however, as quite an innocent form of self-indulgence, and found in earnest people his principal recreation; so he trailed after Janet into any enthusiasm that happened to be uppermost at the moment, and was as ready to protect the mind and morals of Arthur as to finance the Church of England Society for removing the veils from women in harems.

Ida's brother, James, was portly in figure and por-



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tentious in manner. Being unable to keep up with the world, he revenged himself by complaining that he did not know what it was coming to. He maintained an uncompromising hostility to the young, whom he could not understand, and did not very much mind whether Arthur was heading for Heaven or Hell so long as he could put a spoke in his wheel and stop him getting there.

The assembled relatives made a frontal attack upon Mr. Pramp as he sat on the veranda after lunch. The veranda commanded a magnificent view to the south over the Surrey weald, and on this particular afternoon in early October was flooded with golden sunlight. The veranda gave on to a terrace bounded by a fence, on the other side of which green meadows, dotted with fine old trees, stretched to a copse which blazed with the full richness of October colouring. The distance was merged in a purple haze. It was a lovely day, and the prospect was a delightful and soothing one for a retired Indian civilian who had just partaken of a particularly good curry. So very English and all that!

And yet the time was not well chosen. It was the dead of the afternoon; it was just too late to be after lunch and just too early to be before tea: it was, in fact, three o'clock: the time when the vitality of the man who has lunched well is at its lowest ebb. If he isn't asleep he ought to be. Mr. Pramp was not asleep, but he was trying to achieve that blissful state as hard as he could, and the sight of all these middle-aged, prosperous, energetic-looking people coming on to the veranda just at this time made him feel very cross. He expected more sense, or at any rate more forbearance, from the old vicar who came with them. But, then, the vicar had done his best to keep the deputation away, and had

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been overruled. He now accompanied them, partly to see the fun, and partly to pour as much oil on the troubled waters as he could.

Janet, as a blood relative of Mr. Pramp, was deputed to state the case for the family : she had in fact insisted on doing so. It was a forcible though somewhat incoherent statement. They had come to speak to him on a matter touching Arthur's welfare. They did not wish to interfere between father and son, a sacred relationship, but they could not help thinking that he must be unaware of certain happenings to which they regarded it as imperative, in the interests of the family as well as of Arthur himself, to draw his attention. Augustus had been so long out of touch with the world, that he was perhaps unaware of the dangers it contained for the young, dangers which she could assure him had multiplied terribly since his time. His goodness of heart too was apt to mislead him, to make him unduly indulgent, and unable to credit the wickedness and weakness of others. It behoved others therefore to let him have the benefit of their greater and more up-to-date experience of the world.

Here Uncle George interrupted the speaker with the remark that it was the business of the wise to repair the harm done by the good.

Mr. Pramp begged the speaker to be more specific. What did she want ?

It was about Arthur, she said. They thought perhaps that he did not know where the boy was drifting. His political opinions were disgraceful, and though he was used to the society of gentlemen and had been brought up among nice people, he consorted with low Radicals. Just at present he wanted to join, perhaps had even joined already, a low club in London which was

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run by people of this sort. Ida had been up to see the club and had heard some really dreadful things there. Nobody minded people doing wrong occasionally if they repented afterwards, but these people seemed to make a principle of wrongness and to glorify it. Ida was sure they were horrid people and could only do Arthur harm. If he wasn't wise enough to choose wise friends for himself, they must choose for him. He must be protected against himself. It would never do for the family if Arthur became identified with Atheists and Socialists, for that was really what these people were : no, it would certainly never do, especially with James standing for Parliament at the next election !!

Arthur would probably marry one of these women, or worse still, live with her without marrying, in a Garden Suburb. They knew the kind of thing, sandals and djibbahs, a mob of babies, troubles over the drains and all that.

Mr. Pramp remarked that the Hampstead Garden Suburb, which he had himself visited, seemed an excellent place to live in, and that everybody there looked very healthy. The children too were happy.

"All that Golders is not green," said Uncle George darkly.

"I wish, George, that you wouldn't interrupt with your irrelevant remarks," said his wife. "They may be very witty, but wit should be confined to its proper sphere. This isn't a law court."

"No, my dear, it's a solemn family discussion."

"Well, then, keep your funny remarks for the courts, which are the proper place for them. This is a serious affair, and I wouldn't have my brother think that we were not serious when we come to speak to him about the welfare of his son. Now, I have only one more

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thing to say, and that is this : this is an age of self-indulgence, bodily and mental ; there is license in morals and license in ideas ; there is no respect for authority, no deference to experience, no obedience to one's elders. Arthur has caught the spirit of his age ; nothing is sacred to him : he won't go to church, he neglects his people, and I tell you frankly, I suspect his patriotism. He said some very queer things about the war last time I saw him. Now, unless you take a strong line with him, we shall have him disgracing the family by going to prison for some crotchet he is pleased to call his opinions, or running off with a chorus girl, or a little Jewess from Stepney, before we know where we are. We think, therefore, in the interests of the family, that the time has come to take a stand. In the first place, I expect you allow him too much money. A young man with money in his pocket in London runs into all sorts of dangers, and the more he has the more he is likely to fall into debt."

"Appetite grows with the income it feeds on," interjected George.

"I wish, dear, you would be quiet until I've done. Curtail his allowance, then, and demand a strict account of how he spends it. In the second place, forbid him to join this club. If he persists, cut off supplies. There is nothing else to be done. You have the power, and you must exercise it ruthlessly in the interests of the family name and of Arthur himself. What is the use of being strong if you can't impose your will ? "

"One touch of Nietzsche makes the whole world sin," said the irrepressible George, apparently to round off the eloquence of his wife. Janet, who had risen to her feet in the vehemence of her conviction, sat down.

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Mr. Pramp looked round blinking in the afternoon sunlight. "Has anybody else any advice to give me as to how I should treat my son?" Nobody apparently had anything to say. James moved uneasily in his seat, and mumbled something about "young whipper-snapper," but failed to follow it up, and the others maintained a complacent silence, conscious of the rightness of their cause and the disinterestedness of their motives.

Mr. Pramp said that he quite understood their point of view. Arthur must be protected against his own ideas: they might lead him astray. And he, Mr. Pramp, disagreed utterly. As he said, he quite understood them; it was what he would have expected of them. He was certain that the whole affair had been got up by the women—Janet had done all the talking—and it was like women to want to interfere with other people. Women were only interested in personalities; that was why they loved gossip and revelled in scandal. They were incapable of any impersonal interests; they could never attain to an objective attitude towards life. Knowledge, for instance, for its own sake, was meaningless to them; so was beauty. Schopenhauer had noticed long ago that women had no æsthetic sense: Schopenhauer had watched them at a concert. But they were clever at assuming a passable imitation of an æsthetic sense, both because men liked them to look pretty and because the ability to play the "Moonlight Sonata" and to appreciate the pictures of Roger Fry, endeared them to the cultured male, who preferred, when young, to mate with apparently cultured women. This predilection for cultured women was mere sentiment on the man's part: when a man grew older he wanted physically healthy women with no pretence of



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culture about them. All the best marriages had been marriages between intellectual men and beautiful women with the minds of guinea-pigs. After all, a man didn't want to talk to his wife: it was only because nowadays he made the mistake of trying to, that modern marriages were usually disastrous.

It was the same with learning. Women distrusted learning: they suspected the learned man because he was interested in something impersonal for its own sake, something which didn't relate to them. It diminished their hold over him. But because of this peculiar male habit of wanting to know, women, being adaptable creatures where men were concerned, had exfoliated a certain aptitude for learning which they pursued vigorously enough until they had made it achieve its object of capturing a man for them. Then their text-books went into the fire, they forgot to be seen reading poetry, and they returned to their old game of interfering with other people. Women could assume any disguise that was required of them, even a knowledge of mathematics, for the purpose of sex. When the purpose was achieved the disguise was cast aside, and . . .

"My dear," said Ida, "aren't you rather wandering? We came to speak to you about Arthur, and it isn't only we women. George and James both think as we do."

Mr. Pramp, however, not at all put out by the interruption, went on with his discourse.

"Ah yes, Arthur! That reminds me. Now, why do you women want to interfere with Arthur? First, because, being women, you can't abide his having intellectual freedom. You feel vaguely that Arthur has found in this Socialism of his something bigger than

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himself, something that he can work for and lose himself in, something that will emancipate him from the petty world of personal relationships in which you excel. I have watched Arthur closely lately ; yes, I have watched him when you have thought me only blinking my old eyes preparatory to the afternoon slumber that God is good enough to send me on top of an adequate luncheon. Slumber after luncheon, you understand ; very important. Ought not to be missed ! What was I saying ? Ah yes, Arthur. I believe Arthur is really doing this from disinterested motives ; he wants to help the people, he wants to raise them and educate them, and he wants to diminish the sum total of injustice in the world. Odd ideas for a young man to have, but there you are, he has them ! I think he's wrong ; I don't believe it is to be done that way, but then, I'm a disillusioned old man who doesn't believe, and doesn't want to believe, anything could be done, who doesn't even believe that if it could be done it would be worth doing. But Arthur has youth and enthusiasm ; he sees our class for what it is, and I am inclined to agree with him. We have so long regarded ourselves as the centre of the universe, we governing British classes, that we have come to believe that the rest of the universe is only there to put us in the centre. Arthur sees other uses for the rest of the universe, and he is a little doubtful about the propriety of having people like us as its navel. I expect he wants us to go, and to put a lot of workmen in our place. There I don't agree with him ; I doubt if workmen would be any better, and at first they would be a lot worse. But all this means something to Arthur ; it's a real objective interest to him, and you women hate it because, being incapable of such an interest yourselves,

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you realize that it undermines your influence over those that pursue it. In their souls women always hate artists and visionaries, scholars and even politicians, because they have all got something in life which they value for its own sake. A woman has only her hold over a man, and when a man hitches his wagon to a star, he is inclined to slip the strings of her apron.

"Whether Arthur is right or not in his odd views doesn't concern you ; whether they make him happy or not, which is what matters to me, and I think they do (strongly held opinions always make a man happy), doesn't concern you. What does concern you is that they make him independent of you, and that's what you can't stand. It isn't the Socialism or the Anarchism or whatever it is you mind ; it's the fact of his taking anything except love or money-making seriously. If he became a hermit, a martyr, an artist, a temperance reformer, a monk, or an ascetic, you would object just as strongly, and trump up just as imposing arguments for your objection. And, in the second place——" But here Uncle James broke in :

"This unwarranted attack upon the ladies, Pramp, is not only beside the point, it is insulting. I—I won't listen to it. I came here in the family interest to save the family name ; but if you can't take the matter seriously, I must leave the house."

"I assure you, my dear James, I am perfectly serious ; but don't let that deter you if you wish to relieve us of your company. In the second place, as I was saying, the women object to Arthur because they think there is something morally shocking about advanced views, and they begin to bristle all over like a lot of porcupines with outraged feelings. Now, I've no objection to people being shocked. To feel shocked

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is quite a harmless form of self-indulgence. But they should not pretend that there is anything noble or distinguished about it, or that the feeling is prompted by a desire to save the family name. The family name ought to be able to look after itself by this time : we gave it practice enough in our young days, and I am sure Arthur won't prevail against it when all we could do left it intact. But the fact of the matter is you are getting old, and you don't like to think of Arthur enjoying himself in ways which are no longer open to you. So you adopt a 'dog in the manger' attitude and tell him he really must not. That's what your morality is, a calling of sour grapes at pleasures we are getting too old to enjoy ; and as morality is maintained by the old for the benefit of the young, most pleasures that are worth having get called immoral ; feeding, sleeping, gossiping, plotting, on the other hand, which are the chief indulgences of the old, pass unchallenged. The young, you see, are too busy enjoying themselves, whether we like it or not, to bother their heads about whether what we do is moral, or whether it isn't. Nobody does bother his head about morals until he is too old for enjoyment, or rather, old enough to find his chief enjoyment in blaming others for *their* enjoyments. We all like blaming ; it's fundamental in us, especially if we are females ; and, as we always have to invent some kind of reasons for our censure, we set our wits to work to produce arguments to justify our own disagreeableness. The result is called morality ; but it is only a rationalization of the impulse to blame.

"Now, I would like to blame Arthur. I am horribly envious when I think of the jolly little affairs he is probably having up there in town, and there is much

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in me that would like to stop him. I can't enjoy myself in that way any longer, why should he? And I might feel tempted to say a word to him on the subject, if I thought that affairs were his main business in life; if, in fact, I did not believe him to be really keen on his Socialism. I see danger for a man when love absorbs him, danger of his becoming the lap dog of some woman. The only way to keep women in their place is to keep love in its place. Love in a man's life should be the sweets and dessert; the more serious courses should be composed of other fare. It is because Arthur takes his politics seriously, because he is able to lose himself in devotion to something impersonal, that he can relegate love and women to their proper place—that of a diversion. Socialism supplies him with his roast beef, and he need not make his staple of meringues. And so I can find it in my heart even to be glad of his political views. They provide him with an anchor from which he can swing at ease; they give his life the necessary core."

"Politics may be all very well," said Nancy, "but Arthur's politics are so dreadful. He wants to take away people's property and give it to the poor, and shut up the churches. He thinks everybody ought to be equal."

"You can't approve of Socialism," added James. "It's death to the community. It will kill initiative and enterprise, and reduce us to the level of paupers, with State officials poking their nose into every window of our workhouse, to see if we are bringing up our children according to regulation."

"I don't approve of it, James; I've told you so. I think that as a form of Government it would be rotten. It would give the incompetent an unlimited right to



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check the activities of the competent, and nothing would ever get done. As a habit of life it would be equally unpleasant ; it would produce on a large scale, and invest with all the *cachet* of State authority, the kind of interference in your private affairs that you are now trying to effect in Arthur's. I never saw such a Socialistic move from a set of convinced individualists as your deputation to me this afternoon. But all that is not the point. The point is that Socialism is all the go just now in intellectual circles ; what's more, it's the coming force in politics, and anyone who has got the sense to see what is coming and wants political advancement will join the Labour Party and announce extreme opinions with sufficient violence and assertiveness to make it worth somebody's while to give him a fat job with an income to match and a knighthood in the offing to stop his mouth.

"Whatever else it may be, it's right down good common sense for a young man politically inclined to profess Socialism just at present. He is in the fashion, he attracts attention, and if he is a good speaker he can make himself a nuisance. Now, owing to our tradition of freedom, our way with nuisances is not to imprison them (unless they happen to be poor and insignificant), but to bribe them into discontinuing the annoyance. That's what will happen to Arthur. Either the Labour Party will offer him a seat, or the Government will, and if politics is what it used to be, he'll accept the first offer that is made."

"How can you say such things, dear ? I can't think that Arthur would stoop to that sort of thing," said Ida.

"A moment ago you were furious with him for taking Socialism seriously. Now, when I suggest that his ideas may be only a shrewd dodge to get political

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advancement, you call it sordid. Is there no pleasing the woman? Of course it's sordid. What would you? We are talking about public life. And is public life an occupation for a gentleman? Not a bit of it. You may ask, then, why I let Arthur go into it? Mainly because I have my doubts whether Arthur is a gentleman. I fancy none of the young men of to-day are gentlemen in the sense in which we understood the word: they have neither dignity nor serenity; they think it necessary to apologize for indolence, and they do not know how to enjoy themselves properly. They rush at enjoyment in half-hours snatched from the service of some cause or other.

"I like my Arthur because he is my son, I suppose, but I find him difficult to talk to, and I can't bear his manners. He is rude, for instance, to his mother. Now, I was always taught to be polite even to the people I disliked. I never treated my friends, for instance, with the consideration I reserved for my relatives and acquaintances. Arthur, as far as I can see, makes no difference. He is as rude to his acquaintances as he is to his friends. Perhaps he hasn't any friends. They are a queer lot, this Socialist intelligentsia crowd he has got mixed up with. Probably they don't admit the possibility of friendship. Not intellectual or fleshly enough for them. Everything must be one or the other, I suppose.

"'Mph! a queer lot for Arthur to be among—the Ephemeral Club! Yes, I've seen them: a lot of grubby, unworthy, middle-class, suburban people spending their time poking about among facts, and elaborately explaining how a thing might have been what it isn't. Timid fools! They have all sorts of beliefs and haven't the courage to live up to them.

## THE HIGHBROWS

They believe in overturning the State, yet invest in war-saving certificates to keep it going. They believe that love should be free, and put rings round the fingers of their women. They believe in the socialization of the means of production, and object to the socialization of the means of reproduction. Not an illegitimate child among them! Hybrids, that's what they are, about equally composed of the old world and the new, professing a peevish discontent with the old, but lacking the vision to realize the new. There they are, Miviāns, Ephemerals, and the rest of them, poking and probing and fussing over society like a lot of little insects scratching about on the head of a bald man, expecting to make the hair grow, when all the time the head wants replanting. I'm mortally sorry Arthur ever got mixed up with that *galère*! What are they fit for? For nothing but to go on listening to another talking."

Mr. Pramp paused a moment, and the deputation, who had been at first puzzled, then irritated, and finally bored by these peevish and disconnected remarks, pulled itself together with a start at this last utterance.

Nancy, who had not understood a word for the last half-hour, hearing something that seemed to be intelligible for the first time, woke up.

"Then why don't you put a stop to it, dear?" she said. "He ought not to do what you don't approve of, and you can stop it at once if you like. I shouldn't give him any money if he behaved like that."

"I tell you once for all," replied Pramp, "that Arthur shall do as he likes. It is not my business to interfere with him. He has as much right to sow his intellectual wild oats as his moral ones, and if they

## THE FAMILY AND THE CLUB

bring a harvest of Socialism, that's his look out. He will have to live under it, not I."

"Meanwhile, I suppose," said James, "he may run the country to the devil, financed by you, and assisted by those horrors Ida saw in London?"

"On the contrary, I do not believe that anything that Arthur and all his friends can do will make the slightest difference to the country. Nothing anybody can do will make any difference. I'm not a fatalist, but I can see that the State has grown so big, the forces that animate society so complex, that nobody can control them, nobody can even foresee their outcome. What happens is not due to the wickedness of Arthur's friends, or the stupidity of people like ourselves, or the weakness of the Government, or anything of that kind. It is the automatic result of the interplay of blind economic forces which escape human control and direction. If these forces are drifting to a catastrophic change, not all that we can do will stop them. If they make for stability, not all that Arthur's lot can do will upset them.

"But it's a soulless business, anyway. I can't see any fun in politics myself. It's like playing marbles on the crater of a volcano; and if the thing does blow up it won't be very nice for us, you know. How would you like to be strung up to the nearest lamp-post as a bourgeois, eh James! while your wife was being raped on the altar of socialized love, and your kids merged in a state crèche, with about a hundred to one chance against the society that comes out of it all being any better than ours? Not that that bothers you much, anyway, I'll be bound.

"No, I prefer to leave politics alone. In a world of fools one's first duty is to concentrate on oneself.

## THE HIGHBROWS

Politics and so forth are for those who are young enough to think they matter. Arthur does, and I shall certainly not dispel his illusions. We old ones had better be content with our food and gossip. That's what we like, after all, especially the food. As for living, our children will see to that for us. All of which reminds me that it's quite time for tea. Come along."





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